

THE DIVIDING STONE

By the same author

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The memorial to her husband was Phyllida's only means of expressing the pent-up anger which had been poisoning her mind since the day he was killed by a German bomb, and in her plans for the memorial stone she had the ardent support of the vicar, who had set in the chancel of his church.

Philip had been an unsuccessful writer before he became a pilot, and his marriage to Phyllida had not been a great success. The discovery, by a leading critic of the post-war years, that he was also a poet, and a poet of considerable gifts, came as a shock to his widow and the revelation of how little she knew of her husband. The collection of his poems revealed undreamed of associations with people—with a woman—of whom she had never heard. But the emotional upheaval caused by these discoveries was swamped in the storm which blew up over the memorial stone, a storm begun by the pacifist Bishop, who had it removed from the village church; a storm which owed much of its force to the literary interest of the national Press in the story of the dead poet's past; a storm, however, which brought unexpected solace to Phyllida.

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by

MICHAEL HARRISON



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**To 'Don' and Jean Donegall:
A small but sincere tribute to
an old friendship**

... Unborn TOMORROW and dead YESTERDAY:
What do they matter, if TODAY be sweet?

'IT'LL COST A BIT, MRS. HAMMOND,' SAID JUDKINS, STARING DOWN at the sheet of writing-paper that he held in his dust-dried, thick-fingered hand. He added, not looking up from his close study of the writing on the paper, 'Though I shouldn't charge you what I might—I say *might*, mark you—charge to some other folk as I could name.'

Phyllida Hammond said quickly—too quickly, she knew (and instantly regretted):

'I don't think we need haggle about . . . about . . . about this.'

It had always been like that: the sentences refusing to end as they had begun. On the same note, as it were. Her father had said something once about a desirable change. 'You want to beg'n quietly, Phil, and *end* with a climax. Don't *begin* with one, and go off half-cock. . . .'

Phyllida had always known that it was her deep and unconquerable nervousness—her shyness, even—which made her seem so much more abrupt, so much more dictatorial, so much, yes, more bad-tempered, than she ever felt. Ever could feel, for that matter. This shyness, which long ago had developed a touchy defensiveness in her manner, rather than in herself, had always been, Phyllida felt, her worst enemy. Affectionate by nature, yet afraid to make the approaches to friendship, because she felt herself to be clumsy in the expression of even the simplest emotional needs, she had been, both as child and as young woman—she was still but thirty-two—as prickly, they said in Hasling, as a hedgehog tangled up in barbed-wire.

Phyllida knew that this shyness-bred touchiness had made her enemies; what she did not realize was that it had still not prevented her from keeping some friends. She believed—since there had been only one to whom she had come close enough for the sweet relief of self-revelation—that there was no one in the world who could see beneath the tough surface; who could guess at the cause of the touchiness; who could sense the aching to be as ordinary, as taken-for-granted as all those others unbeset by this deep, all-corroding unsureness.

She believed this; but she was wrong in believing it. Hasling is a small Northsexshire village, as yet 'undeveloped'; though the population has trebled itself, and the village's income

multiplied itself a hundredfold, since the day, late in 1905, when Phyllida's father, Dr. Stevens, put up his plate under that of old Dr. Grace. Yet, for all its smallness—or, perhaps, rather because of its smallness—there is little to do with even the least important of its thousand-odd inhabitants that every one of the other inhabitants does not know: and this in regard to their inward feelings as well as to their outward show.

Phyllida knew as much of the others as the others knew about the rest. The really extraordinary thing was that Phyllida did not realize that they also knew as much about her as there was to be known.

It is true that she would have been offended—perhaps deeply hurt (and, after a fashion, not a little shocked)—to have heard the blunt and apparently uncharitable way in which those among whom she lived 'explained' Phyllida's aloneness.

'It was just the same when she was a girl: that touchy you wouldn't believe. Many a young chap I know 'd've been glad to hang his hat up to her, and some risked her hoity-toity ways and did. And then . . . well, I suppose he wanted a kiss, like any other young chap, and . . . well, that was the end of that.

'But she's a good girl—a nice girl—for all her don't-you-dare-to-touch-me ways. She's got a good heart, there's no denying that: which is more 'n you can say for *some*. All the same, I'd as lief not have to put up with her ways morning, noon and night. I like a bit of quiet in my life. Easy . . . if you know what I mean. . . .'

Phyllida would not have understood this sort of 'explanation' as the expression of a true understanding, even of a true compassion. She would have resented—bitterly resented—the pity that even she would have seen to lie at the bottom of this seemingly half-grudged tolerance.

But, as it happened, she believed that her shyness—and all the mental states deriving from that shyness—was her own secret. Yet, with the contrariness of self-pity, she most ardently desired that someone—some loved one—should discover her secret; should uncover her hidden self; should gently remove her basic fear and as tenderly encourage her to cast off the protective hardness behind which her essential softness had hidden, as well as guarded itself.

She was aware that it would have been better for her, if she had to speak abruptly, crossly, that she should continue, rather

than repent half-way through the sentence, so that it ended in a dismal apology for its beginning. That was what her father had meant: that people don't really resent any mode of utterance, so long as it be sure of itself. He had said once: 'A sergeant needn't bark; but he can bark all right, and get away with it, so long as he doesn't apologize for doing so.'

But, though Phyllida couldn't help snapping, she couldn't help feeling sorry for the snapping, long before she had said what she was going to say. And more: she couldn't help knowing that, in this way, she lost the advantages both of peremptoriness and of meekness. In this way—oh, dear Heaven, how she had made her life miserable by doing it, and knowing it!—she antagonized without being able to dominate; and gave in without earning the friendship that soft words seemed to earn others.

And now she had snapped at Judkins, because... because...

Ashamed of that sharp note which had sounded, quite against her will, in her unthinking reply, Phyllida—too late—sought to soften her tone. Her voice lost its edge, and the sentence trailed off into a lost sigh.

Judkins, however, had known Phyllida since, at the age of four, she had taken to coming into his stone-mason's yard, and there, sitting on a slab of Aberdeen granite or Portland stone, had gravely watched the then hardly middle-aged Ted Judkins ruling guide-lines, pencilling out the letters after the first meticulously careful spacing, and then the long rhythmic chiming of wooden mallet on steel chisel, and of steel chisel on the hardly less metallic stone.

Judkins cut all the inscriptions himself. He had always—at least, as far back as Phyllida could remember—employed a man and a boy (when the boy grew up, the man would either die or get pensioned off; and another boy would replace the boy—now grown to manhood), but his assistants were employed to do the artisans' work: the man-handling of the slabs of stone, the shaping and trimming, and—after Judkins had cut his inscriptions—the setting up of the headstones and the assembling of the stone curbs in either the churchyard or in the County Council's much larger cemetery three miles out of Hasling, on the Staintree road.

Dr. Stevens did not know whether or not he approved of Phyllida's going so often to, and—when she did go—staying so long at, Judkins's yard. His uncertainty came from the fact

that he was both a doctor and a country doctor, which was not at all the same thing. The doctor that he had studied to become knew all about silicosis: a terrible disease of the lungs (fully and horrifyingly described in any reputable medical text-book) which is caused by the inhalation of stone-dust; but the country doctor that he had become, as it were by the easy way of natural development, knew very well that hardly anything happens to human beings as laid down in the text-books; and that it is rather a proneness to diseases in the sufferer which causes disease, than any specifically dangerous element in the conditions in which humans live and work.

Inhaling all that granite and Portland dust, Dr. Stevens used to reflect, Judkins and all his assistants should have been spitting their lungs up years before. But . . .

And Phyllida continued to walk down to Judkins's yard, and there sit, in a wondering abstraction, watching Judkins carve his cherubs' heads (they all had the same face: that of Percy, Judkins's youngest brother), his 'Peace, Perfect Peace's' and his 'R.I.P.'s.

Phyllida might, she used sometimes to think, have got over some of her shyness had Judkins been more talkative. He had explained this, not once, but many times: 'I've gotten into the habit, like, Missy, not to open me mouth, along of breathing in the dust'—and it had been many years before Phyllida one day had realized that she had accepted the explanation without bothering to examine it.

But, once she had examined it, she had seen that it could not possibly have been the true explanation of Judkins's taciturnity. She realized that Judkins was naturally silent, and that it might be possible to believe that he had chosen a trade in which he would have to keep his mouth shut—literally—as it might be possible to accept the fact that only those men with an unconquerable disposition to silence joined the Trappists.

But, Phyllida found herself sighing, as she looked back over the uneventful years, I wish, I *wish* someone had made me join in more, had taken me out of myself; had forced me to play with ~~the~~ others. I don't think they should have let me spend all those hours mooning by myself, listening to the tap-tap-tap of Judkins's mallet, recording the brief details of yet one more of my life.

* * *

Judkins did not answer. He did not even acknowledge the

fact that Phyllida had spoken—or that he had heard her speak. He tapped a splayed forefinger on the paper, and said: "Something this long, Mrs. Hammond. . . . Well, it's as I said. It'll cost a tidy bit."

Phyllida choked back the angry retort which was almost through her lips. She did not believe that Judkins was 'trying to be kind'; she knew perfectly well that Judkins was trading upon old intimacy in permitting himself to be as obstinately Northsexshire as he could be. He did not even mind how long her—or any other customer's—inscription was; he did not even mind whether or not they paid. He liked his work; and he believed that man—including himself—had been born to labour as the sparks fly upwards. But he did think that he should be allowed to make difficulties, so that the customer should go away impressed, if not with the mystery of the stone-mason's craft, then at least with the difference between ordering half a pound of tea and a dozen lines of respectful and affectionate tribute to the departed.

In any case . . .

'Then there's . . . well . . . ' And now it was Judkins's turn to hesitate, to falter, to trail off. He rubbed his stubbly chin with a hand as hard and silver-grey as the stubble; and now he did look under grey, tufted eyebrows at the young woman. At last he said, somewhat diffidently, 'Had you any idea how much this here grave will cost, Miss Phyllida?'

Phyllida knew that the reversion to the use of her Christian name was not altogether accidental, though it might not have been consciously intended. She realized that Judkins, not quite at ease, was trying to re-establish the intimacy of years before, so as to re-establish the gentle domination that any adult must have over the child who loves and trusts. And Phyllida knew quite well what was embarrassing Judkins: and that it was not a question of the grave's cost.

All the same, Phyllida's resentful obstinacy rose up to counsel her, why should *I* help him out? If he's going to make objections, let him voice them! It's not my business to suggest ideas to him. (Because, all the time, she was hoping that what she had done—what she wanted to do—was *right*, but might entail no 'trouble' for her.)

Judkins saw that he was not to be assisted, and since he, too, was as obstinate, in his fashion, as was she in hers, he pulled a blackened, battered pipe out of a pocket of his unbuttoned waistcoat, and carefully deliberate (and maddeningly, thought

Phyllida), began to stuff a coarse, dark shag into the enameled bowl.

Only when he had got the pipe drawing well, after many an experimental puff, interspersed with 'Oh's' and 'Ah's' of near-impatience or full approval, as the case might be, did he say:

'Well, now . . . I reckon it'll cost . . . Miss Phyllida, what sort of stone was you contemplating, like? A granite? Or maybe a Portland? Or even a Kentish rag? Them granites comes out quite dear-like. *Quite* dear-like,' he added, glancing at her, Phyllida thought, almost as though there were some subtle element of reproach in his remark.

'Course,' he added, judiciously, 'it's all a matter of what you prefer.'

'I want the . . . ' Phyllida was going to say, 'I want the dearest'—for it was for that, for the dearest, that she had been saving. But she did not say this. Instead, she said, 'I want the best.'

'Just so,' said Judkins, seeming to remember the paper that he still held in his hand, for now he bent his head to re-read the writing. 'But,' he said, 'there's . . . well . . . '

'There's *what*, for goodness' sake?' Phyllida asked, though her heart sickened within her to know that the feared difficulties were not to be avoided: hardly to be postponed.

Unruffled, Judkins looked up from the paper.

'The wording, Miss Phyllida: that's what.'

'Oh . . . and what's wrong with the wording?' Phyllida asked, with too quickly beating heart.

Judkins bent his eyes once more to the paper. He said, 'There's some as may not like it, Miss.'

Phyllida snatched the paper from the stone-mason's hand. She could hardly speak, for the sickening palpitation of her heart; but it was at moments like this that she could most force herself to do what was fundamentally distasteful, ~~anxious~~, to her. And so, just as she could force herself to rebuke ~~her~~, to protest against over-charging by shopkeepers, to complain to station-masters and chief-inspectors and post-office supervisors, so now she summoned up courage to 'have it out' with Judkins. For Judkins, as she realized, with a sick pang, was but the first of many; the vanguard, the leading file, as it were, of battalions, regiments, of the

Opposition. But if Judkins were not to be put to rights at once—and fully—how would she be able to cope with all the other Judkinses? Judkinses more educated, more cunning, more powerful, more brutally obstinate?

She said coldly:

‘The lettering on a headstone is surely my own affair? Or,’ and she sounded insolent now, as well as cold, ‘do you object to cutting it, Judkins?’

‘I don’t object, Miss,’ said the man, taking his pipe from his mouth, and shaking the saliva from the mouthpiece with a violent downward jerk. ‘Not speaking personal, that’s to say.’

‘Well, then. Well then: that’s the end of the matter. If that’s the inscription I want . . .’

Unintended by her, a note of pleading had crept into her voice; but Judkins went on as though she had not spoken. He said, ‘Well now, I wouldn’t go so fur’s to say *that*. Miss Phyllida. There’s plenty others got a word or two to say, come to that. Can put their spoke in, in a manner of speaking.’ He nodded confirmation, as he stared down at the paper. ‘Dozens of ’em, come to that. . . .’

‘Such as. . . ?’ Phyllida asked, nervously haughty again.

‘And,’ said Judkins, pursuing his own train of thought, ‘I’d want to be perfectly certain-sure (as a mere matter of honesty, if I may say so) that you was quite in order to put up this here headstone before I put you to the expense of cutting the inscription.’ He added, almost as though speaking to himself: ‘It’d cost a tidy bit, you see. . . .’

Phyllida asked slowly, spacing out her words as carefully as Judkins spaced out the words on his tombstones:

‘Will—you—*please*—tell—me—*which*—others?’

Judkins pursed his lips. He was not the least bit intimidated by her rather theatrical anger; but he did feel moved by his inability to explain her wrongness (as he saw it) without offending—and, perhaps, even hurting—her. So that a few seconds passed before he said, ‘Well, for a start, there’s Rector . . .’

‘Oh . . . and why should Mr. Cartwright object?’

‘I don’t know as he *will* object,’ said Judkins, thankful to have found someone on to whose head Judkins might divert some of Phyllida’s angry scorn. ‘On the other hand, Miss, if he *did* object, why, there wouldn’t be no honesty in me running you up a bill for fifty to a hundred pound or more. Now, would there?’

'But why *should* he object?' Phyllida asked. 'What is ~~that~~ to object to?'

'I didn't say he *would* object, Miss,' said Judkins, a little colour now showing even in his dust-whitened cheeks. 'What I said was, Rector's got to sanction these here inscriptions, every single one of 'em. Without he do that, you nor any one else won't be allowed to put the stone up.'

Phyllida took a deep breath and then said, deliberately calm:

'Very well, then, Mr. Cartwright. Yes. But you mentioned some others?'

After a pause, Judkins said, 'There's the Bishop.'

'And will he "make a fuss", then, Judkins?' Phyllida asked, with what she intended to sound like the gentlest sarcasm.

Judkins shook his head slowly, staring at the bowl of his pipe.

'Hard to say, Miss,' he answered, as though he had missed the sarcasm. 'But he's not the same as Rector.' He added, as though it would help her to understand the fundamental difference between the men, 'Older, for one thing.'

'And for another thing?' Phyllida asked, well up to Judkins's tactics.

'Have you ever heard of a thing called *Christian Force*, Miss?'

Phyllida shook her head, frowning.

'No . . . I can't say that . . .'

Judkins said contemptuously:

'Well, Miss, it's what you might call *another* kind of British Legion . . . for the chaps as couldn't quite belong to the Legion if they felt like it. (Which would be so, in any case.)'

'Oh . . . A pacifist organization?'

'Just so, Miss.'

Phyllida nodded her comprehension, without betraying, except by a nervous flutter of her eyelids, her apprehension.

'And Dr. Edwards . . .'

'Is one of the heads,' said Judkins, now regarding the paper as though he had seen it in a new and more important light.

Phyllida said, in a curiously weak voice:

'So you think . . . so you think, Judkins, that the Bishop . . .'

The man said kindly, 'I don't say he would, Miss. But . . .' he glanced down at the paper—'I can't say I can see the Bishop, with his ideas, taking somehow to this.' He tapped to the paper with the nail of his forefinger. 'It's . . . well, it's all against what he preaches, if you get my meaning.'

Phyllida said bitterly, 'I wonder if he's asked himself what

would have happened to *him*, Judkins, if there—if everyone had been of *his* way of thinking? He mightn't have been sitting so snug in his palace if . . . if . . .'

She turned away, and Judkins contented himself with a grunt for approving answer.

Phyllida said, still angry, but with an anger now understandable, acceptable, almost welcome, because it sprang from a sincere emotion:

'I'm a fool to cry, Judkins. I . . . I should grow up. Like the officers. Mad with much heart, Judkins. . . .'

The tears were running unchecked down her cheeks, but Judkins did not look away. He had too much tact for that.

'I reckon you haven't cried *enough* lately, Miss Phyllida,' he said. 'God wouldn't have give us tears, more nor He'd have give us anything else, if we weren't to use 'em. There's a time to laugh and a time to cry, Miss, as it says in the Book.' He patted her shoulder in a sort of rough tenderness. 'And if it's the time for tears, why . . . you cry, Miss, you cry.'

Phyllida, her lips quivering, as she sought to check her tears, nodded, and groped blindly at her back for a block of stone on which she might collapse. Judkins took her arm, and led her to the improvised seat. She did not speak, but she essayed a timid, tear-smudged smile for thanks. Judkins picked up a mallet, and went off, through a doorway in a small wooden hut, which was all he needed for an office.

Phyllida buried her face in her hands, and gave way—at last—to the full violence (which was also the full relief) of weeping.

Her body shook with the force of her sobs; but though she could wonder at the violence of her tears, she could be aware, at the same time, that calm, that something of peace, was coming even as the remembered pain of loss and bitterness was persuading her that her weeping could never stop.

Ten minutes later, Judkins—who had been discreetly keeping an eye on her through the hut's one and very dusty window—came through the door again, bearing a cup of dark-brown tea, the spoon almost standing upright in the thick cup.

He did not offer it to her shaking hand, but put it gently down beside her, leaving it to her to take it when she had fought down the brittle trembling ^{the} into which her passion had thrown her.

'Thank you, Judkins,' she said

‘That’s all right, Miss. But, if you could drink a bit of it, you’d feel the benefit of it, like.’

‘Yes,’ said Phyllida, drying her eyes.

‘If you’ll excuse me, Miss, I’ll just get on with a bit of work I’ve got to see to, in my office.’ He hesitated a moment; before he added: ‘If you’d like to give me a call, like. . . ? Or I’ll only be but a few ticks. . . .’

‘In a moment,’ said Phyllida.

‘As you like, Miss.’ Judkins stared down at the paper. ‘I . . . I thought I’d get this spaced out, like.’

Phyllida was conscious of two desires. They presented themselves quite clearly to her mind: unlike the sort of desire that one has in, say, a tea-shop, when one stares at the menu, conscious of a need, but quite undetermined as to what material thing—which choice—can possibly (and best) satisfy that need. She knew exactly what she felt like doing: she wished to put her head on Judkins’s shoulder, and sob her heart out. And she wished—as she found herself expressing it to herself—to strangle him.

For he had touched her heart without erasing the bitterness which fought—and, so far, had managed—to be recognized.

And it was the unconquerable, unsuppressible bitterness—falsely, but oh so plausibly, representing itself as based upon, vindicated by, justice—which cried out against Judkins’s making that bitterness recognize itself for the thing that it was.

But if I forget my bitterness, Phyllida cried, in the agony of her spirit, won’t I forget Philip? Won’t I be disloyal to his memory? To him?

Worse . . . won’t I be disloyal to the things he stood for? Died for? The things I made him? That he became?

To my love, and patience, and hope . . . without which he couldn’t have become a man?

At that moment, Phyllida hated Judkins.

Never mind Judkins was unimportant: a simple artisan whom she had known from childhood, and who was merely presuming on’ old acquaintance. Judkins . . . it was what Judkins *represented*. That was it! *What Judkins stood for*. Judkins: the thin end of the wedge; the advance guard; the leading file of the battalions of the more powerful, the more malicious, the more evil, who would seek to destroy her integrity. . . .

She looked at the cup of tea. The steam had ceased to rise

tenuously from its still surface, and there was a slight whitening of that surface.

Cold enough to drink . . .

She shouted: 'Judkins! How much longer are you going to leave me to drink my tea!'

The old man came shuffling out of his shed, his metal-rimmed glasses askew on his small nose. His eyes looked very shrewd as they peered at Phyllida over the rims of the glasses; but the shrewdness which ordinarily warmed Phyllida's heart (seeing that it had something of an innocent childishness in it) now irritated her beyond a conventional patience. It was like Judkins's damned nerve to think that he could dictate—that he had the *right* to dictate—to her what she should put on her husband's headstone!

Phyllida said aloud:

'I wonder whose husband they think Philip was? Mine . . . or . . . or . . . someone else's?' The tears were very close to her eyes: they were certainly in her voice, so that it shook a little in the rush of indignant words. 'Good God, Judkins: do they forget already there was a war? Do they forget the school at Wright's Pike? And how many of those little children were killed that day? And how'—her voice gained strength, steadied, with her bitterness—'and *how* they were killed . . . as they were doing their twice-times, or whatever they were doing that minute? Do they, Judkins? Do they? Have they forgotten so soon?'

Unruffled, and with only the slightest flush showing through the stone-dust on his cheeks, Judkins stared down at the paper in his hand. He shook his head.

'No, Miss, I don't reckon we none of us has forgotten. And,' nodding briefly at the paper, 'if we had, I'd say you'd got it all wrote down here.'

There was no hint of impudence in his manner, not even that subtle sarcasm for which the Northsexshire native is renowned, and that Phyllida's attention was strained to catch. She said, after only a momentary pause, 'Very well, then. The question is: are you prepared to . . . to engrave . . . chisel . . .'

'Cut, Miss,' said Judkins, gently.

'Cut the inscription,' said Phyllida, frowning the gentle correction away. 'Are you prepared to cut the inscription exactly as I've written it out?'

Judkins sat down on a large block of half-worked stone. He

pulled his old pipe from his hip-pocket, and carefully—maddeningly, thought Phyllida again—stuffed it, and as carefully lit it, before he said:

‘I’m quite prepared to cut it, Miss Phyllida. I was always agreeable to do that. Or anything else you might want. Only . . .’

‘Only *what*?’ Phyllida snapped.

‘Only it might seem a kind of waste, saying I was to cut it, and then Rector . . . or the Bishop . . . wouldn’t let me raise it?’

Phyllida drew a deep breath.

‘I think I’ll be the judge of what . . .’ she began. And stopped. (The old trouble, she thought.) She finished lamely, not looking at Judkins: ‘Anyway, we’ll wait till we come to our bridges before we try to cross them.’

‘That’s right, Miss,’ said Judkins, staring down at the paper. He tapped the paper with a hard nail. ‘Now, Miss, I wouldn’t take the liberty of altering nothing wrote here.’ (Phyllida repressed the inclination to say, ‘I should hope *not*!’) ‘But I *have* took the liberty of spacing out the words a bit more professional-like, as you might say.’ He added, in an explanatory way: ‘To make the words space out better, like.’

Phyllida always prided herself on her ability to ‘see reason’.

Self-consciously, she nodded grave agreement.

‘Quite, Judkins; quite . . . I understand perfectly.’

Judkins, bending over the paper to hide the smile in his ragged moustache, said, ‘I’ve wrote it out the way I should like to cut it. If there’s any little thing, Miss . . .’

He handed the paper to Phyllida, who took it with that still self-conscious air of being above all petty angers. She read the lines through with grave attentiveness, uncomfortably aware of the fact that she felt an almost irresistible desire to look up to see whether or not Judkins was looking at *her*. With considerable effort, she conquered the inclination, and read the lines through to the end.

‘Yes . . .’ she said, a little less steadily than she would have wished—for the mere reading of the words had had power to recall so much of loss, so much of regret, so much of bitterness.

‘Yes . . . Judkins . . . yes. That’s . . . excellent. How . . . how long . . . will you . . .?’

Judkins took the paper, and read it through himself, counting the letters and the spaces between the words. But reading the sense of the phrases, all the same, and telling himself that here was Trouble all right.

Phyllida, watching his face, said:

'Read it aloud, Judkins. I . . . I'd just like to hear how it sounds, read aloud.'

Judkins read the epitaph. Then he said, diffidently, 'The last line, Miss. The *very* last line . . .'

Phyllida frowned, and reached out for the paper.

' . . . "The hands of his murderers?"'

No, Miss. "May they rest in Peace." To her frown of inquiry: 'I'm sorry, Miss Phyllida, but . . . well, mightn't some folk think you meant, May the *Murderers* rest in Peace? Unless, of course,' he added, hastily, 'that's what you do m . . .'

Phyllida gave a little irritated laugh, flushing to be caught out in her grammar by Judkins. (*Judkins!*)

She frowned down at the paper.

'No, Judkins, you're quite right. How *stupid* of me! Now let me see . . . ee . . . ee.' She opened her handbag, and fished out a propelling-pencil. She rubbed her chin, frowning even harder. 'The relative pronoun refers, of course, to the last noun mentioned. So . . . well . . . "they" must—*must*—refer to "murderers". Yes. Of course. I do see. Hm.'

The references to relative pronouns and nouns being so much Greek to Judkins, all that he said was:

'You could make it a bit more clear-like, Miss, if you was to say something like, "May all the innocent victims of . . . andcetera, andcetera". Something like that. Otherwise . . . well, it don't make too clear sense, like.'

'No, no, I see that,' said Phyllida, trying to keep the irritation out of her voice; trying to sound as grateful for the correction as she knew that she ought to be. But, of course, not quite managing to do so. . . . 'Now, if you'll give me *half* a moment'—the pencil was poised above the now soiled sheet of paper—I'll just make the sentence clear. Now . . . hm . . . hm . . . Ah! . . . Yes: I think this is it.' She looked up brightly. 'I'm going to suggest we change it to this. Listen, Judkins. . . .'

'I am listening, Miss.'

'Yes. Well . . . this. Instead of, "May they rest in Peace", suppose we change that to, "May all the Innocent Victims of Terror Rest in Peace." How's that?'

'Very nice, Miss,' said Judkins, non-committally.

'I've used your suggestion, you see.'

'Yes, Miss. We'll . . . I mean,' reaching for the corrected paper, 'I'll have to do a bit of re-arranging—spacing—like.'

'I leave that to you, Judkins,' said Phyllida, rising, and

dusting down her tweed skirt. 'How long will you . . . I mean: when . . . how soon could you get it done?'

Judkins laboriously counted the letters once more, nodding his head like a mantelpiece mandarin as he checked the letters—with a deeper, graver nod to mark each space between words. He jotted down the total on the paper, made some ruminative calculations, in which his tongue, just seen through his lips, played a part; and said:

'Well, there's Mrs. Piggott. (But that's only added to Jeff Piggott's. *He* died just after the war.) Reverend Gilmour, from the Zoar Strict. (There's rather a long one there: Reverend Gilmour never having bin married, and so having it all to himself, like.) Two small 'uns. Them little kids was run over by Crawley's lorry at Three-mile Bottom. General Patchton, from Hardley Old Hall. (Ninety-four, so he's got a lot of campaigns; and they always want them on tablets going into churches.)'

'Yes, Judkins, I know. But how long will mi . . . will Philip's . . . be?'

'Matter of a good month . . . six weeks, more like. Sorry, Miss, but you know me; and you know I work careful. (Not that no one can't afford not to be too careful these days, what with the granite as hard to come by—yes, *and* as dear—as the finest Carrara.) But I was always one for careful work; and if you was to want me to scamp me work, I'd just have to say, my dear Miss Phyllida, I couldn't oblige, not to please you nor no one.'

'Six weeks, then,' said Phyllida, through thin lips. She knew Judkins, as she knew all the villagers. There might be a chance that the six weeks could be shortened to, say, five or even four.

But no shortening would come about through any bullying—or even wheedling—of Judkins, who was now speaking with all the vast authority, the remote-from-ordinary-mankind impersonal dogmatism, of the Man Who Knows His Job.

'Six weeks, then, Judkins. But . . . you won't make it any more, will you?'

'I certainly shan't make it any more, Miss,' said the old man, with a sort of gentle asperity in his voice. 'If I said six weeks, I *meant* six weeks.' Then, softening: 'But I'll make an extra-special nice job of it. You see!'

'I'm sure you will, Judkins,' said Phyllida, a lump rising in her throat as it seemed, not only that Judkins was pitying her, but that all the long years of dreaming, of saving, of

planning saving, of going without, of even more stringent denial: that all these were ended. That the dream had come true—and that now, the merely mechanical details of the dream's accomplishment had had to be handed over to an artisan's competent care.

'Good-bye, then, Judkins!' said Phyllida.

'Good-bye, Miss Phyllida,' said Judkins, touching his cap, and picking up the as yet undrunk tea.

Now that Phyllida was a widow, she lived with her mother in the old house, which was no longer the village surgery, since young Dr. Rogers, who had taken over the practice on Dr. Stevens's death, had moved to a newer house on the Riseley Estate. Dr. Rogers had lived in the old house until he had married; but his wife, apart from her dislike of Mrs. Stevens, objected to sharing a house with anyone—especially in the first years of her married life.

So that Phyllida had rejoined her mother, not so much from a need of familiar companionship as from a shortage of tolerable accommodation elsewhere—more particularly in the London area.

Philip had left only a small amount of money, and he had certainly died unaware that he was leaving his wife even that. His novels had never been reprinted; and a 'tribute', written by an admiring fellow-author, who generously made over to Phyllida any royalties to come on the book, had been remaindered. Phyllida had taken to buying up the copies that she had seen, getting ever dustier, in the one-and-sixpenny boxes, until she had realized that she had set herself the task of buying practically a whole edition. She accustomed herself to seeing *Bellerophon with a Quill* marked 'Published at 12s. 6d. Bargain at Only 1s. 6d.' grow ever dingier and more tattered in the pavement-boxes of Charing Cross Road and the small bookish alleys off St. Martin's Lane.

The critics had been kind to the book: perhaps too kind. They had remembered Philip Hammond, who had died before even the critics had grown tired of calling him 'promising'. And they had recognized that the work, even if an attempt on the author's part to cash in on a reputation greater than his own, was still—ostensibly at least—the tribute that friendship paid to friendship, no less than the tribute that honest appreciation paid to unfulfilled promise. Because of the circumstances

of Philip's death, as well as the circumstances in which the book had been conceived and written, ordinary criticism was not permitted: both author and subject were, in the circumstances, non-attackable. So that—again in the circumstances—the book received its few and tepid notices. There were, of course, no royalties to come from the practically non-existent sales.

But one of Philip's books had survived his death; and it was due to the unsuccessful *Bellerophon* that it did survive—so that, in a roundabout way, the tribute was not entirely without profit.

An up-and-coming book-critic, who had met Philip once, when the critic was merely a young-man-straight-down-from-Oxford filling an unpaid job in an arty publishing house, doomed to an unreported bankruptcy as soon as its small capital should be exhausted, read the badly written tribute, remembered Philip, got out the only book of Philip's in the local public library, and made it the subject of his next weekly broadcast talk on 'Some Neglected Writers'.

Had the up-and-coming critic paused to analyse the reasons why he had chosen Philip among the countless ranks of Neglected Writers as the subject of his talk, he would have found that, though—at this cocktail party and that, at this and that meeting of the P.E.N., at one sort of *Schriftfest* and another—he had met many writers, neglected or otherwise, Philip Hammond was the first real live writer that the up-and-coming critic had met face to face. He could have found, too, that he remembered Philip's charm, at once impersonal and vastly flattering.

Philip had been what is called a 'prolific' writer: which simply means that his books sold so badly that he was forced to write more than a better-selling author need have done. The critic mentioned the fact of Philip's 'vast productiveness', but charitably refrained from suggesting a cause for that productiveness.

'I knew him well,' said the critic. 'Possibly better than most people not intimately of his acquaintance. (I mean, of course, his wife and family.) But I can say that I knew him well, for all that our acquaintance was necessarily brief.

'And here I wish to put forward a theory of my own. I know that, one of these days, Philip Hammond will come into his own. Not perhaps as a great writer—I don't think even he would have claimed that he was *that*. Not even as a writer, not

intrinsically great, but great because he was the vital interpreter of the mood of his time; as the young Lytton—a poor writer—so magnificently was. (I refer, of course, to such a novel as Lytton's *Pelham*.) No... I think that Philip Hammond will come back—if you will pardon the paradox—to something for which he was not so much neglected while he was alive, as positively unknown. I refer to Philip Hammond the Poet.

Ah...! I wonder how many of you—how many even of you to whom the name of Philip Hammond is not altogether unknown—knew that he was a poet of—dare I say it?—the first class? The other day, at the Garrick Club, I was talking about Hammond to the Poet Laureate, and even he expressed surprise that Hammond had written anything at all worth perpetuating. Sir Rupert Tooke recalled some rather airy things—very much in the style of Lionel Johnson—that Hammond had contributed to *The Isis*; and curiously enough, he remembered one or two by heart.

‘But when I quoted *Great and Small* to Sir Rupert, he said—his very words—“You astonish me. You really do astonish me. I had no idea. Not the least idea. Why, this makes Hammond a poet of the first rank!”

‘Of course, one solitary poem does not make a man a poet, any more than one swallow makes a summer. Not even a poem of the very first class. *To Jenny* does not make Leigh Hunt a first-class poet—not even (if I may say so) a poet; any more than the exquisite, the perfect, *To Helen* justifies those people who would class Edgar Allan Poe with—at least—Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

‘But Hammond wrote many more poems than *Great and Small*. Good poems, I mean. Wonderful poems. Poems in which the very spirit of the Keatsian magic lives again. I wonder if you know the poem... the poem that I recited to the Poet Laureate in the Garrick Club the other day? The poem that made the Poet Laureate ponder a moment on the inexplicable fate which can allow a man, not only to be forgotten, but to be utterly unknown—and that man the writer of masterpieces?

‘Let me read you the first stanzas: and then see if you do not agree with me that Philip Hammond—but the poet, rather than the novelist—does not deserve to be forgotten.’

The fact is that, for ten pounds, the critic had bought a manuscript notebook of Hammond's which, left behind in the Barbary Club one night, had been picked up and retained

(‘on spec.’) by a fellow-member who specialized in collecting the MSS. of the great, the promising-to-be-great, the fairly-likely-to-be-great and even the might-be-great. On the news of Hammond’s death reaching the Barbary, the collector of MSS. hunted through his squirrel-hoard of scraps of paper, inscribed menus, notebooks, dedicated novels, and so forth, and found the notebook that he had discovered lying in the smoke-room. A few drinks with the critic; a discreet build-up of Hammond—which provided the meat, even if not the inspiration for, the broadcast; and the deal was concluded.

Now the critic, having invested ten pounds in Hammond the Poet, was thinking rosily of a sumptuous volume, with a preface by the critic, who himself would be hailed as one to be credited with a literary discovery of the first importance. Another Symons finding another Corvo. . . .

‘Hammond’s verse—which, of course, only reflects his way of thought—is marked,’ the critic purred, ‘by an exquisite, a tender simplicity, which reminds us at times of Blake, and at times of poets belonging to an earlier and even simpler age. Such an age, for instance, as that which produced the delicately lovely, *Lulley, lully, lulley, lully, the falcon hath taken my love from me*—such a poem as hides a deep mysticism under the light robe of a tenderly lyrical quality. I wonder if any of you have heard this little poem? (It is by Hammond, of course.)’

The critic rather self-consciously cleared his throat, paused a second or two, and then, dropping his voice a full tone, declaimed in that arty sing-song so dear to persons of his kind:

‘First God made great and foolish things:
And *then* the small and wise.
Vast scaly birds with leathery wings
Went flapping through the skies,
A million centuries before
The lark bid me arise.

Creation lacked simplicity;
With swagger and with pomp,
God chose titanic denizens
To roam the primal swamp.

But, by and bye, from magnitude
God turned Him with a blush;
And let the pterodactyl die,
That He might make the thrush.

Then mourn not; Love, our Passion's death—
That vast and ugly thing—
That vulture. Mourn it not! For now
Our linnet's on the wing.
Our thrush on bough, our lark in sky,
Our ladybird and dragon-fly . . .

Mourn not our taloned Passion! Now
There's thrush on bough,
There's lark in sky;
There's ladybird and dragon-fly.

For searing urge and racking sigh,
There's modest, gentle sympathy.

'I ask you,' said the critic, after a pause heavy with self-satisfaction; 'I ask you to notice Hammond's use of simple—of the simplest—images; the simplest turns of phrase. At times you may feel—as I confess that I have felt—he is not so much guilty of anti-climax as incapable of deep emotion. But a study of his work convinced me—as I feel it will convince you—that his is a very subtle art, hiding passion—all deep emotion—under that veil of emotional simplicity. Listen, for instance, to this poem, written shortly before his death; and which may seem to you—as it seems to me—heavy with a sort of premonition that his days were soon to be ended. It is untitled, but I shall call it *The Funeral Pyre*.'

Again the self-conscious clearing of the critic's throat, as his awareness of perhaps ten million listeners suddenly sharpened.

'They gathered fuel for the poet Shelley's burning;
Broken timbers—jetsam from the sea.
But when I—a poet, too—fall, like a leaf turning,
Inescapably to death: I'll carry my pyre with me!

No salt-encrusted wood from the wine-dark sea
Shall kindle *my* funeral pyre;
But the last few ounces of high-octane spirit
Shall burst, shall flame, shall spire
In a plume of rose-shot grey to the groined arch of the infinite:
Such a smoke as ascended not even from the poet Shelley's
burning,

When the shepherds on the Ligurian hills, turning
Aside from their labour a minute,
Saw the smoke afar-off, and wondered what burnt on the sea?
Different *my* poet's flame: when my *crate* crashes earth with
me in it:

Men, watching the smoke, will know what has happened to *me*.

'That's an extraordinary poem, don't you think? Almost slangy, of course; until you realize that the slanginess is intentional: what one may call the poetical counterpart, not of the purposely ragged uniform cap which was almost the livery of The Few; but of the spirit behind that ragged cap. I won't call Hammond an "Air-Force poet"—a poet's a poet for all the world, or he isn't a poet at all. But Hammond did in an extraordinary way, interpret the mood of the Air Force, as it existed during the days when the fate of our country—of the whole free world—seemed to hang so precariously in the balance. It is inevitable that that mood must pass; and so Hammond, and poets like him, acquire an importance apart from their standing as poets. They acquire importance as capturers of the transient mood. The Siegfried Sassoons, the Rupert Brookes, the Lascelles Abercrombies, the Philip Hammonds: all these have captured the transient mood; have recorded it for posterity; have given it not only permanence but—I dare say—immortality.'

The critic paused, and Phyllida, who was listening, with her mother, heard the rustle of a turning sheet. The critic's deep breath sounded startlingly loud: louder, almost, than the rustle of the paper.

'I have searched,' he continued, 'for any poem which might be described as humorous. I have found none, though I cannot say that none exists. Suffice that I have come across no poem so to be classed.

'But there are poems which may be called light. Yes . . . I think that that's the word. And yet . . . and yet . . . Always there is that underlying something—which-isn't-at-all-lightness. Let me read you this little poem, that I have called (since Hammond never put a title to his poems) *The Mouse*. Before I read it, let me ask you to notice how simple the *idea* of the poem is. Yet see how Hammond's own particular genius shows, in that he could take so ordinary an idea, and realize that it was too ordinary to escape notice, before he made it the theme of his simple poem.

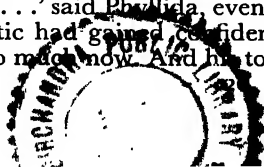
'Here, then, is *The Mouse*.'

Mrs. Stevens, in the brief pause which followed, whispered hurriedly.

'Did you. . . ?'

'No, no . . . ' said Phyllida, even more hurriedly. '*Please. . . !*'

The critic had gained confidence with his talking. He did not rush so much now. And his tone had freed itself somewhat



from that sing-song which had marked his earlier readings of Philip's poems.

'... *The Mouse* ...

• Little grey mouse:
Now I realize
What it was I saw in your eyes,
As I shoo'd you away—
Unthinkingly (harshly stopping your innocent play).
Now I can say
What I saw in your eyes,
Little grey mouse . . .
What did I see, when I said to you: "Shoo!"?
Gentle amazement,
Modest resentment,
That any should speak to *you*
So in *your* house!

'I want you,' said the critic, with an earnestness that even he felt to be not altogether assumed, 'to remember that this power to identify oneself with what is called "the lesser creation" is the mark, not only of the great poet, but, to a large extent, of the saint. I cannot say more here than to suggest that no one may be either a saint or a poet until he has learnt to think of all creation as equally the work of God; and so to think of all creation as equally deserving of interest, and having equal rights. Blake and Shakespeare and Saint Francis of Assisi and Isaac Watts and Ralph Hodgson had this curious, enchanting ability to see the humblest of God's creatures as an equal—since God had made both the observer and the observed.

'And, of course, as the poem that I have just read shows, this power to identify human hopes and fears with the hopes and fears of a small animal was possessed by Philip Hammond. I should just like to . . .'

Phyllida leaned forward and switched the set off. She expected that her mother would say, 'Oh, Phyll! Just when I was *enjoying it!*' and this, indeed, Mrs. Stevens was about to say. But, instead, she checked herself, seeing Phyllida's face, and said, 'Phyll: did you. . . ?'

Her hands clenched, Phyllida thrust her two thumbs into her mouth, gently, rhythmically tapping her upper teeth. Her elbows were resting on her knees, and her whole body was hunched forward, as she sat gazing into the fire. She drew a deep breath, and shook her head.

'No,' she said, 'I never knew. . . .'

'He never told you he wrote any poems?' And when Phyllida shook her head: 'Do you know, Phyll, I find that very hard to believe!'

'I'm lying, then?' Phyllida asked, but without heat.

'Now, now, child,' said Mrs. Stevens, with that sort of conscious patience which may be more irritating than anger, 'you know that I didn't say anything of the sort. But, seriously, did Philip never . . . I mean: didn't he ever show you any poems?'

'He showed me,' said Phyllida, staring at the fire, 'a lot of *rhymes*. . . .'

'Well, then! But that's what I . . .'

'Rhymes,' said Phyllida. 'R-H-Y-M-E-S. Not poems, if that's what you're implying.'

'Well, really, Phyll, I was only . . .'

'I know. I wonder,' she said, almost as though she were speaking to herself, 'where this chap got the poems from? They can't have been published.'

'Oh, I don't know so much. They might have been. They . . .'

'No. Otherwise they'd have had a title. The man was reading them from a notebook . . . or . . . or sheets of paper. Or . . .'

She paused, and her mother quietly filled in the uncompleted part of the so-hastily broken sentence.

' . . . Or . . . *letters* . . . Phyll?'

Phyllida nodded.

'Yes . . . letters. . . .'

Mrs. Stevens said, with an air of changing the subject which was not lost upon her daughter, 'Did you . . . I mean: *was* Philip fond of animals?'

'You mean the mouse poem?' Phyllida said, really to change the subject, because her mother's question had hurt as only the unforeseen and unexpected stab may hurt. 'Well . . .'

'But was he?'

Phyllida said, with a bitterness that she could not conceal:

'He was cracked about the damned things. Balmy about them. . . .'

Mrs. Stevens looked like those well-groomed, elderly, strictly 'motherly' ladies who model for sober knitwear on the covers of the more sedate women's magazines. It had not made life easier for Phyllida that her mother used as much to

behave as to look like those ladies. 'Never a cross word . . . ' was Mrs. Stevens's favourite summing-up of her life with the late Dr. Stevens; and Phyllida, who had seen her father grow purple—nearly apoplectic—with rage, knew what her mother meant by 'never a cross word'. She meant silence at the moment that the adversary was on the very verge of a stroke.

So now, thinking that 'motherly tact' was necessary, Mrs. Stevens said gently, 'Well, Phyll . . . Now, about those poems. . . .'

'Yes,' said Phyllida, wearily, 'what about them? I never knew he wrote poems, if that's what you're asking. Are you?'

'I'm asking . . . (And, by the way, Phyll, there's no need for you to speak to your Mother in quite that off-handed way!)

'I'm sorry, Mother,' said Phyllida, in quite that off-handed way.

'That's better. Yes . . . Ah, yes, I know! I was going to say . . .'

'When I rudely interrupted you,' said Phyllida.

'Now, Phyll! *Dearest. Really* . . . Now, do pull yourself together. I was only just going to . . .'

Phyllida put her fingers into her hair.

'Mother,' she said, 'do you realize that I've just had to listen to all about Philip? Do you? Do you? Do you? No, Mother . . . I won't be calm. I won't. *I can't*. Yes . . . ' With a deep breath, and locking her hands in her lap. 'I'm sorry. I will be calm. I . . . Where were we?'

'I was only going to . . .'

'Of course. Yes. You were just going to ask about Philip's . . . I mean: whether or not I—his wife—knew that he was a poet? No, Mother . . . I didn't know. He . . . he wrote . . . No, he didn't write anything, as far as I knew. I mean . . . poems. Rhymes, I said. I . . .'

'Oh, Phyll,' said Mrs. Stevens, putting her knitting aside, and crossing to the fireplace, to put her arms about her daughter's shaking body. 'Oh, my darling child: don't cry so!'

'I can't help it! I can't help it!' Phyllida sobbed. 'Oh, Mother, I wish I were dead.'

'No, no, darling . . . my darling . . . Don't say such things. . . .'

'Oh, Mum, but I do . . . I do. I *do* wish I were dead. I . . . Oh God, I wish I were dead!'

Mrs. Stevens said, 'You mustn't . . . really you mustn't.

There!' as Phyllida raised a tear-stained trying-to-smile face; 'there, there! Now look, dear: you read the paper; and I'll go and make some Ovaltine.'

Philip had never known why the doggerel rhymes that he had—it was his phrase—'sprung on' her had had the power to annoy her. He had never known why the silly jingles had made her hurt him by her refusal to hear them with patience, to smile at them, even to hear them at all. She used to say to him sometimes, even before his inevitable 'why?' had only served to deepen her anger, 'Oh, why don't you grow up? You're . . . what? Thirty-five now. Don't you think it's about time you got out of the nursery?'

She could admit now—though she had known it at the time—that the childish jingles had hurt her because they were essentially, not so much childish in any disparaging sense of that word, as because they were—they should have been—made for the delight of children.

They hurt her because she could never hear them without thinking: there should be children to laugh at these silly rhymes.

And there had been no children. . . .

So that Phyllida had grown jealous of the rhymes, made up for the children which were not hers—which were not to be hers. And a bitter—almost, one could have said, a crude—jealousy developed in her heart for those things which were, or seemed to her jealousy-tortured spirit to be, the shallow substitutes for the children that she ached after. She grew to dislike Philip's stroking a dog or a cat—but especially a cat, since a cat seems by convention to be more a domestic animal than a dog—and children are more attracted to cats than to dogs. From dislike of his stroking a cat, she grew to a near-hatred of the animals themselves, that they had an affection from him that there were no children to enjoy. She grew, by steady if imperceptible degrees, to be jealous of the cats themselves, seeing them as the living rivals of her dream-children. And long before he died, Philip had learnt not even to 'notice' a cat sunning itself on a wall or dancing around a wind-dizzied leaf.

Philip had hurt her in many ways; and the pain was no less deep because she was aware that a man may hurt a woman unthinkingly. But he had never hurt her so much as in his

refusal to have children—a child, even. ‘What . . . now? With . . .’ With whatever it was looming ahead. At first, the repayment of debts, then the need to find a larger flat or a small house, then the war. . . .

Phyllida remembered her bitter ‘Well, now we *have* got an excuse to have no children! And by the time that the war’s over, I’ll be too old—provided we are both still alive (which I doubt)—to have any. That ought to make you happy!’

And his so maddeningly ‘reasonable’:

‘Well, really . . . Would you really want children . . . with *this* due at any moment?’

The Fat Boys of the newspapers were engaged in their favourite occupation of making their readers’ flesh creep. What Hitler had just said, what Goering had just said, what Goebbels had just said. The *Voelkische Beobachter*, the *Sturmer*, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* of the day did not report Nazi threats—repeat Nazi propaganda—more fully and more accurately than did those British newspapers whose mission, so their leader-columns declared, was to sustain the ‘morale’ of a threatened nation.

Phyllida was aware of herself as a woman. She had never tried to ape a pseudo-masculinity. She had no desire to be anything other than a woman, and she did not care if Goering sent five million bombers—instead of the promised five hundred—over London, the day that war was declared (or even sooner) so long as she could enjoy the fulfilment, the completeness which would be hers when—and only when—she found herself pregnant by her husband. (No, she could admit to herself, not even by the man she loved. It had to be her husband. She was as primitively feminine as that. And she knew it.)

But that night, as her mother was making the Ovaltine, Phyllida, pondering the implications of the broadcast talk to which they had just listened, found herself wondering what other aspect of her husband remained to be discovered—by her?

There need have been nothing so very astonishing about the revelation that Philip had written publishable, praisable poetry. When Phyllida, in reply to her mother, had said that she did not know that Philip wrote poetry, the remark was true only to the extent that Phyllida had never known Philip to write poems, rather than mere rhymes.

But, of course, a moment’s reflection—had Phyllida ever

felt in the mood to contemplate so distasteful a subject—would have shown her that it was probable that Philip had done—possibly still did—poems of a more serious cast than the silly, childish jingles that her own jealousy had outlawed.

'I could have listened,' she told herself. 'I wonder . . .'

She put the thought aside. Already, as she knew—and as others had noticed and told her—she lived too much with the dead. But even for her, there were limits beyond which she had not the courage to pass.

When Mrs. Stevens had returned, bearing a tray on which the Ovaltine steamed in two rose-sprigged cups of inconvenient design, and the macaroons reposed in a silver cake-basket whose glitter hurt the eyes, Phyllida said, 'If I wrote to that speaker, care of the B.B.C., do you think he'd get the letter?'

'I'm sure of it, dear. Would you mind moving the papers from that stool, so I can put the tray down? Ah . . . thank you. . . ! You're thinking of writing to him?'

'I was thinking of it,' said Phyllida, mildly on the defensive. She had hated having to admit to her mother that there was even one thing about Philip that he had managed to conceal from her. (An unfair way of putting it, she told herself: but how many other things were there that she did not know? that she had still to discover? that he had wilfully concealed?)

'They'll forward the letter, I should think,' said Mrs. Stevens, handing Phyllida her cup, and nodding towards the cake-basket. 'But how strange that you shouldn't ever have known that Philip wrote such good poetry! Only rubbish . . .'

'I didn't say that what I heard was rubbish,' said Phyllida, bridling, 'I only said that it was childish. And, if it comes to that, I don't think that this stuff the man's just read is of *that* much better quality. It only has a better class of subject. That's all.'

'Oh, *Phyll!* How *could* you!'

Phyllida stirred her Ovaltine with repressed savagery. At last she said:

'It was my fault that I didn't know what Philip wrote, simply because I didn't ever ask him to show me.' She was once again on the edge of tears. 'The things . . . the things that he did write . . . I mean: did tell me . . . were so damn' silly that . . .'

'All right, dear; all right. I understand. . . .'

'You *don't* understand!' Phyllida shouted through her sobs. 'That's the trouble with me: that no one understands. No one ever did. I . . .'

'Well,' said Mrs. Stevens, primly, her lips pursed tight with resented injury, 'I'm sure I've always done my . . .'

'I said that no one understood, and I was going to add that I don't blame anyone—least of all you, Mother—because I don't understand everything myself. And I was Philip's *wife*.'

'Yes, of course. But . . .'

'And even I didn't understand what was wrong with me. All of the time. But I do understand—now—why I didn't want to hear any more of his god-damned rhymes about pussy-cats. I think I'd have gone mad if I hadn't got him to shut up. And I know I probably still would . . . in certain circumstances. . . .'

Mrs. Stevens said inquisitively, 'Which circumstances, dear?'

'The same circumstances,' said Phyllida.

The critic had sighed as he had recognized the signature on Phyllida's letter. It had been too much to hope for that some ghoulish member of the family wouldn't come trying to cash-in on his discovery. But a word with his literary agent had assured the critic that what he already knew anyway was correct: that the copyright in the poems belonged to Philip Hammond's estate, no matter that the actual physical possession of the notebook itself might well give right of ownership to the critic.

Making, then, a virtue of necessity, the critic answered Hammond's widow promptly, courteously and most fully. He had learnt the art of making friends as well as that of making enemies; and Phyllida found herself pleasantly flattered by the critic's taking her into his confidence through some six sheets of single-spaced account of his 'fight' for Hammond.

'And you, Madam, could, I suggest, help me. In many ways: but most of all in finding anything—even a scrap—which has so far escaped publication. Sad as the task must be for you, the rewards of going through your husband's papers may well be great.'

He suggested luncheon, and did not make the mistake of asking Phyllida to meet him at a less expensive place than the 'Maison Gasconne', though she would have been 'thrilled' to have met him in a cheaper restaurant where she could have had a chance of seeing some of the more prominent B.B.C. characters in the flesh.

The critic was a little, elderly gentleman of about forty,

with tiny hands and feet, pointed, rather red, ears, and a high-pitched voice which seemed to have been designed to broadcast without the assistance of a microphone. In other circumstances, the loudly penetrating quality of his voice might have embarrassed Phyllida, but now—though she told herself that she was being childish—she could not resist the glow of pleasure which came in knowing that the other people in the restaurant were listening to enthusiastic praise of her husband. *Her husband. . .*

‘If you could remember some little thing,’ said the critic, earnestly encouraging (since he had in mind a book to ‘make’ him). He frowned. ‘You say that Mr. Hammond never told you—never showed you what he had written?’

‘No . . . never.’

‘Now, that’s most *interesting*. Most interesting . . .’ And even Phyllida, who had come to forget something, since Philip’s death, of the ways of writers, could see her ‘revelation’ going, suitably embroidered, into a book. ‘I wonder why? It would be fascinating to discover *why*. . .’

‘Perhaps he knew I’m not very keen on poetry,’ said Phyllida.

‘He must have done, yes,’ said the critic, somewhat sourly.

‘Only jingles, you know. . .’

‘His *poetry*, Mrs. Hammond!’

‘No. I didn’t mean that. I meant: Philip only told me silly little jingles. Sort of nursery-rhyme things, you know.’

The critic’s eyes lit up, and he clapped his slender white hands together.

‘Oh, *no!* But how *splendid!* Oh, do *try—please* try!—to remember some. Can you? I do wish you could!’

Phyllida, remembering, said:

‘I don’t think I could. They were . . . well, a sort of Christmas cracker stuff. I mean,’ she added, defensively, against the something more than reproach in his eyes, ‘they were the sort of thing you have just said when you say, Good heavens! I’ve made a rhyme! Touch wood! You know . . . like that.’

‘I think they must have been *just* a little better than that,’ said the critic severely. ‘After all . . .’

‘Yes, but,’ said Phyllida, now rather wildly, ‘you don’t know how . . . how childish—well, not-grown-up (if you know what I mean?)—my husband was.’ She realized, with a sick pang, that all this was destined to go into a book; that the critic was baiting her to tell all; but for the life of her she

couldn't *not* say what she wanted to say. 'I read somewhere that Chesterton—(Did you know Chesterton?)'

A grave nod.

'I met him, though, of course, he was really a little before my time.'

'Yes, but . . . well, that sense of childishness. Didn't Lewis Carroll have it, too? I, well, I . . . it's so hard to say exactly what I mean. . . .'

'Oh, but do try, Mrs. Hammond,' said the critic, with a care for his book. 'Do try. You don't know how important this all is. Do try. . . .'

Phyllida thought. She said to herself, this little pip-squeak doesn't care a damn for Philip or for me or for anyone except his own precious self. But . . . somehow . . . he's forcing me to *see* Philip; to understand Philip; to . . . yes: this is what he's doing which justifies even him: he's forcing me to *face* Philip.

So that she said, first of all, 'Do you think we could have a little more coffee?' And then: 'It depends what one means by childishness. There is a childishness, I imagine, which is simply a not-growing-up. And there's another childishness which is simply won't-grow-up.'

'Dear lady! How *true*!'

'Well,' said Phyllida, 'the first doesn't need any explaining. It's just arrested development. But what of the second?'

'Ah, indeed. . . !'

'I don't know,' said Phyllida, leaning back a little as the waiter refilled her cup; 'I don't know that I'm right, but I do feel that that second sort of childishness is . . . ' She forced herself to remember Philip in the moods that she had found most irritating, and had hated because they had made her angry with him. 'Is . . . well: an escape from all the burdens that the acceptance of an adult condition lays on us. It's not subconscious, that second sort of childishness. It's purposeful. . . .'

'Oh, Mrs. Hammond! Surely . . .'

'My goodness,' said Phyllida, before she could stop herself; 'you just live with it, and see!'

It was too late to retract. She had committed the grave social fault—she the first to condemn it in others—of going too far in confidences. But (she strove desperately to find excuses) this man *admired* Philip. In a way, he could be thought of as Philip's friend. (And, poor darling, God knew he needed them enough!) It was—more desperate striving for excuses for the blunder—it was only like talking to a psychiatrist or

something. And then, to cure all regret, came the chill thought: it's just as though you were talking about Chaucer or Milton or Wordsworth. What does anything matter now? Now. Now that Philip is as dead as Cicero; and all that he was is public property. . . .

'I wonder,' said Phyllida, strangely calm, 'if I can make you see Philip as he was?' She saw the quick, bright flash in the small, dark eyes, and she smiled. 'I know this is all copy to you. . . .'

'Oh, Mrs. *Hammond*!'

'Why not? You want to write a book on Philip, don't you? You want to know what he was like? Well, then . . .'

'Of course, I'm very interested . . . ' said the critic, gently, not to frighten off this unexpected, this un hoped, fortune. 'And, naturally, anything that you like to tell me which is off-the-record, stays, well, off-the-record. I do hope,' he added, earnestly, 'that you believe that.'

'I shan't tell you anything,' said Phyllida, 'that I don't want repeated. But the first and foremost thing to know about Philip is that he chose to remain a child because he was unsure of his ability to cope with the world as a man.'

The critic nodded.

'Yes, I see . . . But that's not so very unusual, you know.'

'I don't think I suggested that I thought it was.'

'Tell me, pray (that is, unless you would rather not?), was he . . . how shall I say it? (You won't be offended, will you, I wonder?) . . .'

'Oh, please!' said Phyllida, impatiently.

The critic flushed at the tone.

'I'm sorry. I was just going to ask, Was your husband a good business man?'

'He never made any money, if that's what you mean,' said Phyllida, flushing, despite herself, in her turn.

Having recaptured the advantage, the critic said equably:

'Curiously, that was not quite what I meant. Many a man with a most characteristic childishness—child-like-ness, I suppose, is the better word—shows an extraordinary competence in dealing with the world. In financial matters, I mean. No one would say that Barrie wasn't more at home with childish ideas than, say, Edgar Allan Poe; yet Barrie was an exceptionally shrewd business man, while poor Poe died a beggar's death. . . .'

'Philip didn't exactly do that,' said Phyllida, primly.

'He had his pay,' said the critic, emboldened to a courageous bluntness by something that he had seen flash for a moment in the deepest depths of Phyllida's eyes. 'My point is—forgive the seeming irrelevant inquisitiveness (it isn't, all the same, I assure you)—would Philip Hammond have died as solvent had he had to rely on his writings?'

Phyllida looked the critic straight in the eyes. She said slowly, 'Do you know, I *do* think that's rather—what shall we say?—impertinent . . .'

'I'm sorry,' said the critic, miserably; 'it wasn't intended to be so, I assure you.'

'Literally, I mean,' said Phyllida, rather liking the way in which her great, scornful eyes could reduce even so resilient a spirit as the critic's to temporary self-mistrust, 'I meant "impertinent" in its literal sense. Impertinent. Irrelevant. Beside the point. Not appertaining to the subject under discussion.'

'Yes, yes,' said the critic, edgily, 'I know what "impertinent" means, Mrs. Hammond. My point is—though I'm sorry you think differently—is that there's hardly anything in a man's life—certainly not in an artist's life—which is irrelevant.'

'Possibly. But there's a good deal,' said Phyllida, in a most feminine way, 'that there's no point in digging up. And,' she added, 'I'm still alive. . . .'

The critic sighed, and snapped his thin-lipped mouth primly shut. He fiddled about with his coffee-spoon for a moment or two before he trusted himself to open his lips again. He said:

'Well, then, now let's see where we are?' He essayed a brief rather wintry smile; and was heartened to see something of an encouraging answer in a narrowing of Phyllida's eyes. 'You will look out for anything of your husband's among his papers. And'—a little wistfully—'you will try to remember any of the little rhymes? I think,' the critic added, taking a quick glance at the future, and making provision against what looked like trouble, 'I'd better let you have my manuscript bit by bit as I do it—just so that, if there should be anything you didn't quite agree with—you could tell me at once, and I could change or eliminate it?'

'Yes,' said Phyllida, refusing to show any signs of gratitude. Gratitude was, she saw, evidently expected. (But, goodness gracious! gratitude for what? Just for ordinary civility? Just for ordinary expectable courtesy? What next!)

'Well, then,' said the critic, damped, 'is there anything else, before we say *au revoir*? Any little thing. . . ?'

He was looking at his large, square, gold wrist-watch, and so he missed the sudden tightening of Phyllida's lips; the sudden narrowing of her eyes. But he heard what she said clearly enough.

'I should like to see the notebook containing the poems . . .'

But there had been nothing in the notebook, apart from poems, save memoranda of the most trivial nature. There were occasional sentences written in what looked like Greek, but which turned out to be English written with the Greek characters: a simple precaution against none but the most ignorant. But these turned out to be only the record of debts—paid or overdue for payment. There was nothing in the little book which told Phyllida more of her husband than she had already known.

And the discovery had left her strangely confused: unable to know whether it was relief that she most felt or whether she did not feel, despite herself, a sense of disappointment. She decided that, if she was disappointed, it was not because she had hoped to catch Philip out, as to end an uncertainty that—almost without her being aware of it—had troubled her for a long time. At last, she was forced to admit that there had always been an element of doubt in her relations with Philip; that he had always been something of a mystery to her; and that, the more that she had probed into his not-too-subtle, but still quite complex, character, the more she was aware of—baffled by, rendered uncertain by—an element of mystery.

But what had he been hiding? It was so hard to think what it could have been; and something outside reason (something coming rather from the heart than from the head) told Phyllida that, if there had been something, and if she were ever to discover what that something had been, she would find that it wouldn't turn out to be any of the ordinary secrets.

It wouldn't be drugs or women or gambling (she thought of them in this order) but might even prove to be something as silly as Robin Dugald's secret—his great secret; that he was so ashamed of his small feet, that he used to buy size nine shoes, and stuff the excess space up with paper! (Jane Dugald had nearly lost Robin by finding *that one* out. . . !)

The critic, on the other hand, had set about the task of

gathering material for a 'study' of Philip Hammond in a more orderly, a more methodical—and so, inevitably, a more likely to be profitable—fashion. Letters to the various newspapers, asking for the sight of any letters of Hammond's, brought in much material. Calls on Hammond's many publishers produced more letters—some of which (since they concerned money difficulties) Phyllida refused to allow to be published in full or part or even paraphrased.

The critic, not long after he had settled down 'seriously' to the task of unearthing the forgotten trivia of the dead man's life, had developed a strong sense of unfair treatment.

It seemed, he complained, not only to himself but to others, that here was he, doing all the work so that Mrs. Hammond could reap all the benefit, and all that she contributed was constant interference!

'I've a damn' good mind to hand her over all my notes, and tell her to get on with the wretched thing herself!'

'Why hand her the notes?' his friend purred. 'Let her try and see how she'd set about getting all the information *you've* gathered. . . .'

But the critic didn't mean it. There would be a third of the royalties on the book for Mrs. Hammond, true; but that still left two-thirds for himself; and he knew something that the late Squadron-Leader Philip Hammond had never learnt—the critic knew what one does to 'move' a book; to make it go.

He could, in fact, hardly have failed. He had the ear—literally—of anything up to fifty million people in Great Britain, and perhaps ten times that number on the overseas broadcasts. Of course, not all of those millions listened to him; and even where they did they wouldn't all rush straight off to the bookshops to buy or borrow what he had recommended.

But the ingeniously devised mechanism of checking the effects upon sales of advertisement of one kind or another had already shown publishers what a B.B.C. review could do for sales promotion; and the critic knew just what he would have to say—and just how he would have to say it—to make the book go at least like a Book Society First Non-fiction Choice.

Sometimes he would mention this to Phyllida, who was always conscious of a faint distaste in being shown the mechanics of success. (Poor Philip had never even guessed that there were such things. . . .) But what she did not realize

was, that the need to have something superior to offer for sale inevitably was making the critic write better than he had ever written before. Boosted to the skies the book would certainly be; but in anticipation of that boosting, the critic was getting down to the task of writing the best book which lay in his power in a manner which would have done credit to the most unworldly of artists.

'Don't worry, Mrs. Hammond,' he used to say; 'your husband will be known after all. . . .'

The critic was primarily interested in himself; but his interest in Philip Hammond, however material it had been in the beginning, grew naturally and inevitably to a not unworthy sympathy with a man as a man and not as the profitable subject of an expected best-seller. A man lives in his letters more than in his children, more than in his works—no matter how grand their artistry, how deep their feeling—more than in the recollections of his friends. And the stranger may come nearer to the unknown through reading letters than ever in listening to twice-told tales.

Where, at first, the critic had seen Philip Hammond as merely the vehicle by which the critic would get some more of that self-advertisement that he most liked in this world, he came to see Hammond as a man; to understand him as another human being; to sympathize with—and sympathizing, to love—the faults which had made the dead poet such a misfit.

What deepened the sympathy was an old fear that the sympathy aroused. The critic had not always been successful. There had been bills in his life; there had been pressing creditors; there had been false steps; the backing of wrong horses and the barking up wrong trees. He had known the fearful strain of a sense of unalterable insecurity; the mood of despair induced by successive disappointments. Something of this black mood had been forgotten as the almost despaired-of success had at last come—and in a measure fuller than any hoped for (though perhaps not undreamed of). But now, looking through the records of Hammond's life, the critic, reminded of the difficulties that he himself had had to face in the beginning, was coming to have at least some rudimentary spiritual quality. Mrs. Hammond, he remembered as he read through the letters that the many publishers had packed away in their files, had often said, 'You don't know how brilliant he was. He could do so many things. Everything, really.

And yet . . . he couldn't seem to *get* there . . . I wonder why that was?

Reading through the files of publishers' correspondence with the late Philip Hammond, the critic began to see well why Hammond—for all his brilliance (and often because of it)—had got himself, not only on the wrong side of publishers—as of many other classes of society—but also on the wrong side of life.

'My lord!' the critic said, half-admiringly, 'what a really *thundering* ass the chap was!' This was said half-admiringly, because there was something rather admirable in someone's ability to refuse to see the truth so long as that truth clashed with desire—no matter that the opposition to the truth brought every sort of trouble.

For instance, here was Hammond writing to Greaves. (The critic, pursuing a line of thought of his own, glanced at the date: yes, Hammond was already twenty-seven when he wrote this letter.)

Now . . . of *all* people! Greaves. Not only the biggest snob unhung; but the biggest gossip as well!

Yes . . . and the most influential publisher living. . . .

So, we have, the critic said (knowing that he would never be able to write this down, so long as Phyllida remained alive; but subconsciously adopting a literary style in his thinking), two letters. In the later one, Hammond, writing to Greaves, complains of the publisher's indifference—even of the publisher's 'ingratitude'. 'When I look back,' Hammond wrote, 'and think how well I have behaved to your firm. How I have . . .' And followed a list of duties done—and well done, the critic hadn't the least doubt.

Hammond wanted to know why? Why he had been cold-shouldered? Why his books hadn't been advertised? Why the publishers hadn't given him the display, the 'build-up', that other authors had had?

When, all the time, the answer had been resting, not only in the publisher's files, but—supposing that he kept such things—in Hammond's own pile of carbon copies.

Had Hammond ever guessed, when he set out to write those witty comments upon the friends—the heroes and heroines—of such appalling snobs as Greaves, that Greaves wouldn't like it? Worse, would report what an 'upstart' young author had had to say about such eminent social figures as, for instance, Dame Helen Ferratt or the Dean of Rowcester or the Member for West Ralsey?

Of course they were as bogus as Hammond thought they were. Everybody knew that, including (the critic had often thought) the persons themselves.

But . . . Oh, my *lord!*—didn't Hammond know that it just isn't done for the man who hasn't arrived yet to attack the people who *have* arrived?

No wonder, for all his brilliance—and, by Jove, there was no doubt about *that!*—Hammond had failed and failed and failed.

So much so, in fact, that, had there not been a war, Hammond must have ended up as the sort of hack whose writing is bought only so long as it remains anonymous.

At this point, the critic began to revise what he had already planned to write. He realized that a defence of Hammond must not imply any condemnation of the publishers. The fault was in Hammond: justice would have held that, anyway. But the fault must be shown now to have rested *entirely* in Hammond. And yet, still to make Hammond at fault, and keep him a sympathetic character, the critic must show him to have been of a singularly unworldly type; a sort of cross between a tender Dr. Johnson and a brilliantly witty John Clare.

Fortunately for the critic—and his task—certain facts made this not difficult. A search for any published poetical work of Hammond's revealed that the only two that the critic could find had been sold for a guinea apiece: a 'basic' price for any poem, even a bad one.

And these two were, if not of Hammond's best quality, certainly not negligible.

When he sent the completed typescript to Phyllida, she wrote back: 'I think you have done a marvellous piece of work. But—may I say this without giving you offence?—you have made Philip out to be so very much more impractical than he was. In many ways, he had an extraordinary *grasp* of things. He wasn't a bit "fey" or anything like that. And, when I consider things, I seem to think that it wasn't that he didn't *understand* life—and by that I mean business matters, and material things like that—as that he despised it. Or—well, perhaps here I'm going to be a bit confused—it wasn't so much that he despised life as despised the things that people did when they thought they were really being "business-like". It's not easy to explain; and I'm being unkind to make any comment. I realize that, if you didn't know Philip, you have done wonders in presenting his character so vividly. So that it

seems alive to the reader. It really is wonderful what you've done.

'The only thing is: is the character that you've painted so vividly really *Philip's*? Forgive my saying this, but then you didn't *know* Philip. . . .'

But did *I* really know Philip? Phyllida asked herself.

For instance, that poem now . . . The one about the great and foolish things, and the pterodactyl. . . .

It was something that Mrs. Stevens had noticed: not Phyllida. The old lady had said, after a timid but obstinate, 'I should like to look at the book if I *may*, Phyll.'

'That's funny . . .'

'What's funny, Mother?'

'Well . . . look here . . .'

Phyllida had followed her mother's pointing finger. Indicated by that white, shrivelled, gently quivering finger, it was plain enough to see; but Phyllida could not help but ask:

'Well . . . what?'

'Well . . . look!' the old lady said, with a sort of gentle excitement sharpening her tones. 'The . . . don't you see? . . . the different inks.'

'Well, yes. But there could be several explanations of that. His ink ran out. In one pen, I mean. Or the nib bust. Or . . . or something. Or . . . or he had to put it away, and finish it at another time.'

'*Exactly*,' Mrs. Stevens said, not caring to hide her satisfaction with an old person's so much more acute wits. '*Exactly*, Phyll. Do you know,' she added, with a complacency that Phyllida found something more than merely irritating, 'I should have made an excellent what-you-may-call-'em: you know—the men who find things out by studying the originals of Shakespeare's plays, for instance.'

'Oh . . . and what have you found out by studying Philip's manuscript?' Phyllida asked, in a voice that she tried to make as sarcastic as possible.

The old lady flushed.

'The poem was written in two parts. . . .'

'Well. . . ? Even *I* can see that. . . .'

'You didn't see it until I pointed it out to you, dear,' said Mrs. Stevens, gently reproachful.

'No'—full lips pouting, large eyes lustrous, head up. 'But

what about it? People don't write all they want to say all at once. It isn't like writing a short story. You have to think up a rhyme. You may be called away.'

Mrs. Stevens stared down at the notebook, which shook a little in her hand. She said slowly:

'I would say that the last two—stanzas, aren't they called; not verses (verses is wrong, isn't it? Though that's what we always used to call them)—I would say that the last two—anyway, all the part from "that He might make the thrush" has been added a good time after. An afterthought in fact'—she tittered gently at her simple and unintended pun. 'But, seriously, child, can't you see how the ink of the first three ver . . . I mean stanzas . . . has faded? Why, goodness me!' said Mrs. Stevens, quite carried away by her delight in her percipience, 'it might have been *years* after that Philip added the extra ver . . . stanzas.

'Because . . . why, *look*, Phyll! The little poem's *complete* in the first three stanzas. It doesn't—it never did—need anything added. It's almost as though . . .'

'As though what?' Phyllida asked, tight-lipped now.

'It's almost as though,' her mother said, her eyes fixed on the carelessly written lines, 'as though—I don't know—as though he'd used up a short short-story to make a novel, by tacking something on to the end of the short-story.' She shook her head. 'You can see it's been added. I don't mean by the different inks. (Well, not only that.) Something more. It doesn't *fit*. It's like when the New Look came in, and women started to let down their short skirts by putting a panel of material in. You could see the skirt had been lengthened. . . . Do you understand, dear?'

Yes . . . Phyllida had understood. Well . . . that the poem represented the product of two different—two very different—moods. It was easy enough, Phyllida thought, to say when the first part had been written: at any time during some certain years that she could remember almost too clearly for happiness. But when had the—the afterthought; the correction (for that's what it was: no less!) been added? Added, Phyllida thought, with more astonishment than bitterness, not so much to spoil the poem as to alter its sense.

She picked up the notebook, conscious that she was irritated, irrationally but undeniably, by her mother's presence. If only Mums would sometimes realize that there were times when one could be alone with one's thoughts only

when one was altogether alone in the body! And the knowledge that Mrs. Stevens was always so hurt by Phyllida's suggesting—no matter how tactfully!—a need for solitude only made Phyllida more painfully eager for the solitude that Mrs. Stevens's over-sensitivity to slights denied.

So that she put the book away, reluctantly enough. 'I'll take it up to bed with me,' she told herself. 'I'll be alone then. . . .'

Changing not so much the subject as her approach to the subject, Mrs. Stevens said:

'Do you think they've found everything—well, *practically* everything—that Philip wrote? Like Boswell, I mean,' she added. 'You know (Boswell, I mean) when they thought they'd found everything; and then things—masses and masses of papers—started turning up in the most unexpected places. . . .'

Phyllida said:

'But that's just it. The Boswell papers they've been finding in the past few years *don't* turn up in the most unexpected places. They were found when people started to look for them. And, if it comes to that, they were found just where it was most probable they'd *be* found: in the possession of his descendants.'

'Well, I don't know,' said Mrs. Stevens, a little nettled to be corrected so promptly, as well as so firmly; 'they made a great *fuss* about discovering them. I thought—and I'm sure I wasn't the only one—that it was, well, like finding buried treasure.'

'As far as all this relates to Philip's work, Mother, we'd have to know where any forgotten papers of Philip's would be most likely to have been left. Of course, he did forget things—did leave his things scattered about. He left a sort of trail of bits and pieces.' She paused for a moment, and then caught at her errant attention, as she became aware why that attention had wandered. She said quickly: 'Clothes, books, papers . . .' But she said that because she had been wondering—as she had been wondering now for weeks if clothes, books, papers had been the only things that he had scattered after him, on what, until she had met and married Philip, had seemed the most erratic, the most aimless of progresses? She repeated, more emphatically: 'Clothes, books, papers . . . things like that. . . .'

'Where did he leave them?' the old lady asked, inquisitively. And, before Phyllida could answer: 'Couldn't you have gone round . . . well . . . *collecting* them?'

Phyllida, her eyes remote, shook her head.

'I never learnt about this—this *spoor*—until it was far too late to do anything about it. He was always changing his room, and getting the landlady to look after something. And of course, he never went back. Once or twice, I did hunt after something he'd left behind; but on the first occasion, the boarding-house had changed hands; and on the second, the woman flatly denied having seen them.

'I was perfectly polite; but as soon as I insisted, and suggested she might have forgotten, and wouldn't she please look around, she flew into a temper, and that was the end of it. . . .'

'She'd helped herself to them?'

'No,' said Phyllida. 'She'd merely not bothered to look after them. Somebody else had done the pinching. . . .'

'He can't have cared about his things very much. Or was that only when he was still a bachelor?'

'I don't think so. I think that contempt for—for *things*—was fundamental in him. Left to himself, he would never have had—at least, hung on to—anything that he could really call his own. I think,' said Phyllida, very carefully, 'that it's much more important to know why Philip was so careless of acquiring or keeping things than to know just where he chose to "lose" the few things that he couldn't help acquiring. . . . Yes: I do think that. . . .'

'Important, dear? Important . . . how?'

'To somebody writing his life. To somebody making a study of him; of his character.'

There was a silence, during which it was obvious that Mrs. Stevens was giving the phrasing of her next question some unusual care.

'Did he . . . (Phyllida, dear; don't be offended, please!) But did Philip . . . I mean, did he sometimes *have* to leave his luggage behind?'

Phyllida, as Mrs. Stevens used sometimes to complain to her friends, was always 'surprising' her mother. 'Quite unpredictable!' said Mrs. Stevens.

So now, when Mrs. Stevens had nervously prepared herself to endure her daughter's indignant protest, Phyllida laughed.

'Didn't pay the rent? Oh, well, I expect that *that* happened now and then. And, of course, that would account for some of the losses. It might account, too, for the fact that the

luggage wouldn't have been there, even if he'd gone back for it.' Phyllida smiled: quite a warm, tender smile. 'He told me once how difficult . . . Oh, well . . . poor old Philip!'

'If you could remember, Phyllida. . . '

Phyllida nodded, the smile fading gently on her lips.

'Yes . . . if I could remember. But do you think anyone would have bothered to keep a lot of old papers all these years . . . '

'Boswell . . . ' Mrs. Stevens murmured.

Phyllida frowned. Thought better of it. Laughed instead.

'My dear Mums! All the Boswell papers were stored away in old chests in whacking great castles. There just isn't that amount of storage room in a South Kensington boarding-house.'

'You could advertise . . . '

'Yes, I suppose I could. But,' Phyllida glanced at the clock, 'I . . . Goodness, is it as late as that? I must go to bed, Mums.' She stood up, holding the notebook in her hand. 'Advertise . . . Yes: that might produce some results. But . . . I wonder! I wonder if that's what I'd want?'

Mrs. Stevens said:

'Don't you—I don't know; mind you, I'm only suggesting—but don't you feel you rather *owe* it to Philip to collect as much as you can of his work? I mean . . . if it's to be found?'

Phyllida sighed.

'You think that? Well . . . you may be right. But . . . oh, well, I'll think about it. Good night, Mums!'

'Good night, dear!' said Mrs. Stevens, putting her forehead forward to receive Phyllida's light, unthinking kiss. 'Try and get to sleep. Don't start thinking now. . . .'

* * *

But 'thinking'—as Phyllida had discovered since long before even Philip had died—could not be avoided at will. 'Thinking', once indulged, tended to become a habit, a vice, with a hold more tenacious than that exercised by smoking or drinking or what the older sort of historians called 'debauchery'. You could become a chain-smoker or a dram-drinker if you let yourself; and, as Phyllida wearily reflected, her feet dragging on the worn but well-brushed stair-carpeting, you could become if you let yourself (and hadn't she let herself?) a chain-thinker, too.

'Yes,' Phyllida thought, 'that's what I've let myself become:

a chain-thinker. I've let my thinking get hold of me—dominate me. And in the end it'll destroy what mind I've got left. . . .'

The weariness, both of body and of spirit, which always seemed to coincide with the moods of intensest 'thinking'—weariness which preceded and followed that 'thinking'; as though the weariness were, at the same time, the cause and the result of too deep concentration upon the never-to-be remedied faults of the past: this weariness Phyllida knew to be her stronger self's—her saner self's—protest against the *uselessness* of her thinking. The past could not be altered; and Phyllida knew that, in many ways, the past could have been so very much worse. It was true that Philip had died with so little done, relatively speaking; but that he had died with something done should have been more of a consolation to her than, in fact, she had allowed it to be. Her common sense kept urging a harsh truth; and she had fought—with the weaker, the more emotional, the more obstinate side of her—against the acceptance of this truth. But tonight she knew that her essential honesty would not hold out much longer against the full recognition of the truth that all the sorrow that her memory held; all the bitterness inherent in her thousand recollections of yesterday; were there, not from pity of Philip, but from pity of herself. Sometimes half tenderly, sometimes quite angrily, she had pointed out to Philip that he—like too many other men—was inclined to 'moan'. 'My goodness! don't you think that anybody else ever has a cold? But to hear you make such a fuss, anyone'd think you were *dying* of it!'

Yes . . . and she had never known that he had listened to her. Not until, in the notebook, she had come across the lines:

Even a loving wife must scold
The husband with a heavy cold,
If, in a fit of rage, he blows
His streaming, aching, tender nose
So loudly all the street can hear
His brash attempts his nose to clear.

Infection she will risk, but she
Will not permit his vanity
To advertise his woes
As though they're something quite unique.
And *this* is why she'll harshly speak
About his noisy blows.

Remember, there's no paradox
In constant love, which always mocks
A husband's childish fret.
The good wife knows a pampered cold
Must always take as firm a hold
As any other pet.

She laughs, she sighs, she snaps, she scolds,
Not that *she* never catches colds,
But only so that he
May treat his trivial *malaise*
(Which hardly lasts beyond three days)
As lightly as does she.

So . . . that had been the reaction! Humorously expressed as the sentiments of the doggerel were, Phyllida thought that she could detect something not altogether facetious in the rhyme. He remembered the exasperation which had grown upon her (gaining strength by her efforts to conquer it) as Philip had trudged around the flat, blowing his nose every other minute; clearing his throat; grunting his annoyance with a savage Fate which had selected him—alone of all human beings!—to be cursed with a cold!

'Oh, Philip, do be quiet!' She had caught herself up, and forced herself to smile, even though she could no longer force herself to be silent. 'God bless us! I've *never* heard such a revolting din! Must you. . . ?'

How clearly she could see his face! He was standing in the open doorway of the bedroom, dressed only in shirt and trousers, his shoes—due to be polished—held in one hand, while a huge damp handkerchief was clutched in the other. She hadn't angered him or—worse (for his 'touchiness' was, she used to say, the most maddening thing about him)—'hurt' him. No: she had just astonished him; and she had instantly realized that he had always thought that having a cold gave the sufferer a right to be as exhibitionistically 'suffering' about it as he liked. As a sort of compensation, obviously, for the inconvenience of having a cold.

Phyllida had stared for a moment at her husband's blank face. Then her anger had vanished. She smiled and put her arms out.

'Oh . . . my poor boy! Come here!'

And she had still been smiling when she had folded him to her, and pulled his puzzled head down on her shoulder.

Sniffing, he had said:

'I suppose I *do* make rather a fuss . . . Do I, Phyll?'

'Well, you do rather. And,' to excuse the anger that she had felt, 'I honestly think you make colds last longer with all that blowing and snuffling. Why don't you treat the thing methodically? Do what I do? Take a couple of aspirins every two hours?'

'Yes, I could do that. . . .'

'Not just two, and then forget about it. Do the thing properly. . . .'

'Yes. I will,' he said, wriggling out of her arms so that he could blow his nose. 'The only thing . . .'

'Do aspirins make you feel hot?'

'Yes, yes, they do,' he said; and Phyllida had the curious impression that he had grabbed at an excuse not to take something to cure his cold. Did he *like* having a cold?

She said, out of her thoughts:

'I'll never understand you men! You don't seem to *want* to look after yourselves. . . .'

Then he had said:

'Oh, well . . . But, Phyll, I really will try not to make such a . . . ' he was going to say 'noise'; but, possibly feeling the indelicacy of the implication, substituted the word 'fuss'. 'I really *won't* make such a fuss. . . .'

'Well,' she said, smiling, 'you could *try*. . . .'

And now she realized that she had never, for one moment, expected him to try. More: she saw that she had never realized that he *had* tried. Yes . . . and succeeded.

She looked down at the notebook through a mist of tears. Such a silly poem to cry about. Deeper, more moving lines would leave her tearless; but this jingle . . . this jingle . . .

She closed the small book with a sudden half-angry snap.

She thought:

'There are some people who only begin to live for us when they die. . . .'

Sleep came late; but it was the morning which followed, rather than the memory-protracted, too-long night, that Phyllida remembered. For the early post brought three letters; all of which seemed to her—and were, indeed, to prove themselves to be—of importance.

The maid brought up the tea at half-past eight; and Phyllida getting a sulky 'It's okay' to her forcedly cheerful,

'And what's the weather like today, Ethel?' knew that Mrs. Stevens was about to lose yet another servant.

This sort of thing—one couldn't call it a 'catastrophe' or a 'tragedy' since it happened so often—was part of Mrs. Stevens's life. Phyllida supposed that her mother, denying herself the permissible right of losing her temper—even under the strongest provocation—with her Nearest and Dearest, somehow balanced things up in quarrelling—without any apparent provocation at all—with bus-conductors and shopkeepers and servants. Especially servants.

People were fond of remarking how odd it was of Mrs. Stevens to quarrel with her servants—they didn't say 'quarrel'; they said, 'not get on with her servants'—when you couldn't imagine Mrs. Stevens ever being *without* a servant. And 'seeing how hard they were to get,' people said: meaning, of course, how hard servants were to keep.

'Mother,' said Phyllida, 'has servants as other people have other things. She doesn't smoke and she doesn't drink. And even if you smoked only twenty Players a day, and drank beer, you'd be spending more than Mother does in wages. It's something she wants; and something she's determined not to go without. And that being so, there's no question of her being able to afford it, or not afford it. When you want something as badly as a drink or a smoke, you can always find the money. It's only for things not quite so important—things like clothes or a car or even the rent—that people can't find the money. Mother *expects* to see a servant about the house, just as other people *expect* to be able to have a cigarette when they feel like it. And so—well: Mother has a servant. It's a question of wanting something, and nothing to do with being able to pay for it. . . .'

All the same, it would have been so much more restful, Phyllida thought, conscious of a mild irritation that the day should have begun on a wrong note, had Mrs. Stevens been able to refrain from getting each maid's back up. So silly to insist on a standard that hardly a Ritz waiter could have lived up to. Mother ought to have known by now the hopelessness of expecting that little farm-girls should, in some miraculous fashion, have been trained to be perfect parlour-maids.

Phyllida would quarrel herself, when need was; but the restless night had tired her; and it was with half a hope that she might undo the harm that Mrs. Stevens had already wrought that Phyllida said placatingly, 'Are there any letters, Ethel?'

'On the tray,' said the girl, firmly, decisively and offensively rejecting the olive-branch, and slapping the tray down on Phyllida's lap.

Phyllida sighed—but not too loudly—and waited until the door had almost—almost, but not quite—slammed behind the resentful maid.

'I wonder what Mother said *this* time?' Phyllida said aloud, as she picked up the three letters stuck into the one vacant slot of the toast-rack. Three letters . . .

She put them aside, and poured out her tea; and, as she buttered the toast, she looked at the envelopes, trying to guess the identity of the senders.

One cheap manilla envelope addressed, with laborious care, in an uneducated hand. The stamp bore the Hasling postmark; yet it could not have been a local tradesman's bill, since Mrs. Stevens settled all the household bills. Phyllida guessed that only Judkins could have sent *that* letter.

The origin of the stout, good quality manilla envelope was not difficult to guess. It was thick: full of paper. Phyllida thinking that she recognized the typewriting, guessed that the envelope contained the promised galley-proofs of the critic's book. Thinking this, she was conscious of a pleasant sense of expectancy; of a sense of promised pleasure which suddenly removed all the depression induced by Ethel's sulks.

And the third letter?

Well, that was not so easy to place.

It was a private letter, the envelope was of something more than good quality paper. The paper was thick and expensive; almost too thick and too expensive, Phyllida thought, to be in the best of taste. The sort of envelope—as unusual in its paper's quality as in its shape (a glove envelope, with the flap running lengthwise, instead of across)—that a person might use, not so much because of a taste for expensive luxuries as because of a constantly felt need to impress the recipients of—her? Yes; it was a *her*—*her* letters. Phyllida, checking her guesswork, put the envelope to her nose, sniffing delicately. There was the faintest smell of—what? Phyllida could not place the scent; but it was still familiar enough to her that she should be able to say 'Paris!' and add, 'Rather tarty, too!'

The handwriting, once you had decided that a woman had addressed the envelope, looked feminine enough; but a man *could* have written that bold be-damned-to-you, 'Mrs. Philip Armitage Hammond.'

And then, thinking how strange it was that Philip's second name, as well as his first, should have been used, Phyllida noticed the stamp. A Canadian stamp, with a Montreal postmark.

'Now, who on *earth* do I know in Montreal?'

Phyllida wiped her knife on a piece of toast, and then opened the letter which looked as though Judkins might have sent it.

Judkins had sent it.

Madam [it ran],

I have just Received an unexpected Delivery of some peices of White Carrara Marble also some peices of a Yellow Marble called Giallo Antico. Both would make up very nice and I should appreciate the Honour of a call as I wish to give you First choice of this unexpected delivery.

Yours respectfully,

E. Judkins and Son.

'White . . . yellow . . .' Phyllida said. 'I wonder. . . ?'

The stout, bulky manilla envelope contained the slip-proofs, folded and caught together in a thick elastic band. There was a covering note from the author:

Dear Mrs. Hammond,

I am sending you the second set of galley-proofs, so that you can suggest any (unmarked) necessary alterations in the copy. It's fairly inexpensive to make alterations while the proofs are still in galley; but don't interpret that too liberally, *please!* I've had a quick glance through, and the proofs look pretty free of obvious errors to me. And, of course, you did see the book as it was being typed.

However, if there's anything you think ought to be altered, please note it on the proof, and I'll alter the set of marked proofs accordingly.

With kind regards,

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

Phyllida said, 'Which means: no corrections, please!' before she saw the postscript.

PS. The book has been read for libel by Farringdons' tame lawyer. That's quite the usual thing. Oh—and something else, I'd nearly forgotten. A Mrs. Hunter-Greer wrote to me, saying that she has a poem—or poems—of your husband's. I wrote back and

told her that it was rather late in the day to include any more discoveries, but she might care to write to you. I leave the decision in your hands.

Phyllida stared long at the postscript, knowing that Mrs. Hunter-Greer's letter was even at that moment lying by the breakfast tray, unopened.

Why—if it were possible for Phyllida to make alterations and amendments in the proofs, so long as they were still in galley—why could the poems (poems?) in Mrs. Hunter-Greer's possession not be inserted into the text of the book?

There was an ominous smell of passed-to-you about that postscript; and the more that Phyllida pondered the implication underlying those too carelessly light phrases, the less inclined did she feel to open the letter which bore the Canadian stamp.

Phyllida opened the small drawer of the night-table, and took out the notebook that she had placed there eight hours before.

Quickly but carefully she began to search for something that she had seen but not understood; that she had noticed, but to which she had attached no importance.

Ah—yes! Here it was . . .

A H G—C N B C—Montreal

That was in ink; quite (for Philip) carefully written. And underneath, in pencil, a note obviously scribbled in great haste:

Friday, Oct. 3 9 o/c

There was no year given; but even had Phyllida forgotten that the day of the week would give the year, she remembered when Philip had been in Canada, as Acting Wing-Commander at the Training School at Fort Rioux.

Friday, October 3rd, Nine o'clock . . .

Phyllida pushed the tray carefully down to the bottom of the bed, threw back the covers, and got out of bed. She was conscious that she was about to behave in a manner very unlike that of the Phyllida people knew; but for all that, it was only after she had had a long and meditative bath, dressed (and lingered over the dressing), tidied up her room and smoked a

cigarette, sitting by the open window, that she found the courage to open and read Mrs. Hunter-Greer's letter.

* * *

Phyllida had not found that the envelope, in its material, shape or odour, had attracted her to the sender. The sheet of writing-paper contained in the envelope did nothing to lessen the prejudice inspired by the envelope. Mrs. Hunter-Greer's address—1103 De Rougemont Towers ('It would be!' said Phyllida)—was engraved in the most costly style, the self-consciously plain, tiny letters being more affectedly vulgar, Phyllida thought, than something more flamboyant would have been.

There was a monogram, made up of squared-off letters; the sort of thing, Phyllida thought, that you found on cigarette-cases in a Bond Street jeweller's; and there was a crest—a something-or-other rampant—above the monogram. The paper smelt strongly of the scent that Phyllida had remembered but could not name.

'Well, really!' said Phyllida. 'Was Philip *impressed* with all this. . . ?' Angrily, she began to imagine what Mrs. Hunter-Greer, of 1103 De Rougemont Towers, looked like.

Phyllida knew how old she was, of course.

Fifty . . .

At least . . .

* * *

After Phyllida had read the letter—it was short enough to cover only a page, even in Mrs. Hunter-Greer's large handwriting—she began to be uncomfortably aware that she was not as certain of the writer's age as she had been before reading the letter.

There was energy in the letter; and it was the energy of maturity: of full maturity. It was the energy of someone who had been determined always to have her own way; and who had always succeeded in her determination. It was, if you liked, the energy, the force, the will, of someone who had never been particularly young. But Phyllida realized uncomfortably that this by no means meant that the woman was—or ever would be—particularly old.

On the face of it, the letter gave nothing away. Its evidence at the best was of the most subtle kind, and deductions concerning the writer were to be made from such things as the paper,

the address, the handwriting, the pen, the scent, even the ink. All these separately could tell something; added together, they might tell something more; but, at best, they could never yield the certain evidence, that the carefully non-committal letter denied.

'Dear Mrs. Armitage Hammond . . .'

'I see,' said Phyllida. 'By giving me a double-barrelled name, she thinks she makes herself look unpretentious. Silly *bitch!*'

I hope that by now you will have got over the shock of your husband's death enough to be able to hear from a total stranger in reference to that tragic event. I expect that you will have heard that, hearing that a book was to be published on your husband's life and work, I wrote to the author, offering to let him have some poems (copies, I mean, *not* the originals) that your husband gave me when he was with the R.A.F. in Canada during the war. I got what I consider quite a funny sort of letter back. At least, I didn't consider it a bit co-operative. But the author did suggest that I might like to get in touch with you.

So I have done so. If you would like to have copies of the poems (I am sure they have never been published) I'll send them with pleasure. I have always had a great admiration for your late husband's work, and liked him and greatly respected him as a person.

I was very upset to get the news of his death.

Yours most sincerely,

Anne Hunter-Greer.

So *she* was 'A. H. G. . . .'

A. H. G. Friday, October 3rd. Nine o'clock.

It was an obscure and not-to-be-analysed impulse which made Phyllida, after she had read Anne Hunter-Greer's letter, take off the old Fenwick tweed ('good enough for Hasling!') and dress herself up in the new Donegal with the dark bottle-green velvet collar. She changed the now rather shabby Scott felt for a small, tightly fitting velour which matched the collar of her suit; and she even changed her well-polished brown walking brogues for a pair of low-heeled black lizard Oxfords, the most elegant (as well as the most expensive) shoes that she possessed.

She put on a pair of emerald and diamond ear-rings; small,

synthetic, but elegant; and she gave more attention to her hair and her face than they had had in weeks. Since, in fact, she had not been to a luncheon at the 'Maison Gasconne'.

When she came downstairs, and stood—a little self-consciously—before her mother, Mrs. Stevens said:

'Why, goodness! You didn't tell me you were going to London?'

Phyllida, pulling on her white buckskin gloves, flushed. She said, trying to keep childish 'defiance' out of her voice, 'I . . . I'm not. Well . . . I mean, I *may* be. But I haven't made up my mind yet. For certain.'

Mrs. Stevens pursed her lips, and gave her daughter's turnout a comprehensive and (on the whole) disapproving survey. She said, over the tops of her glasses, 'I don't see why you want to dress yourself up just to go trapesing round the village.'

Phyllida checked the hot rebuke—for the truth was that the impulse which had made her dress herself in her most elegant outfit was, as well as being obscure, vaguely a guilty one. She felt ill-at-ease before her mother, because she was conscious of having done something which, if not altogether wrong, had some element of error—of danger—in it. She feared that Mrs. Stevens might say, 'But *why* have you dressed yourself up in your *best*, just to go into the village?' And because Phyllida was uncomfortably aware that she might have to force herself to answer that question, she gave the soft answer which is not only supposed to turn away wrath, but is commonly credited with the power to veer questioners away from the pursuit of awkward questions. Phyllida said, with an admirably contrived lightness, 'Oh, I don't know. I just felt sick and tired of my old things, so . . .'

'Yes, I know, dear. But this is all you've *got*, really.' And that would have been well enough, had Mrs. Stevens not thought fit to add: 'As though anyone in Hasling would notice. . . .'

Phyllida made a little impatient noise.

'Perhaps that's just *it*, Mums! Perhaps . . . I don't know. But I wonder: is it such a good thing not to mind that people don't mind? Don't give one a second glance?'

'There's such a thing as being suitably dressed, Phyll. . . .'

'And there's such a thing,' Phyllida snapped, 'as throwing in the sponge; letting oneself go. Turning into an old frump. Mother,' she said, passionately, 'do you know how old I am?'

How *old*? Do you realize I shall be thirty-three next birthday? Only seven years and I shall be forty?’

‘Yes; I know. But . . .’

‘There’re no buts about it! What good are clothes, nanging in cupboards—feeding the moths? What *good* are they?’ And her temper rising with every frustrated attempt of Mrs. Stevens’s to interject some calming remark: ‘Do you know *how* many times I’ve worn this suit, Mums? Do you? I *wonder* if you do!’

‘But it’s your . . . I mean . . .’

‘You mean, it wasn’t made to make me look nice. To make me look young. To make me feel good. No! You mean that it was meant to hang in the wardrobe, like the clothes hang in the show-cases at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Do you *know*, Mums, how often I’ve worn this outfit since I bought it? Do you? I *wonder* if you do! *Three times*. There! Exactly three times. The first time, when I went to London with Dolly Fane, and she bored me stiff, waltzing me ’round Harrods and Harvey Nichols. The second time when I went to the dentist in the morning, and saw that awful French film with Dolly in the afternoon. And the third time when I went to luncheon to talk about Philip’s book!’

She looked at herself in the overmantel mirror, and suddenly all the insecurity went out of her defiance. Indignation—self-pity—call it what you would—suited her. But so did the hat and the ear-rings.

And then she knew why she had dressed herself up. To go to Hasling. . . . Except that it wasn’t to go to Hasling that she had taken such care with her appearance.

‘*I look fine*, she thought. *I never knew I could look so smart, so elegant. I’m glad I got myself up like this. I’m a match for anybody.*

She said:

‘The proofs of the book arrived this morning.’ She patted her black lizard handbag to show not only where they were, but that they were in her possession.

‘Oh, I *would* like to see them. . . .’

‘Yes. Well, you shall. But I think I’ll go up to London. Definitely. There are some things. Well . . . that’s what I’ll do.’

She called at the bank first, and drew out five pounds. She could not afford to spend five pounds on what Mrs. Stevens would have called a ‘jaunt to London’; and that fact

strengthened her resolve to spend all of it on everything which could not possibly be called useful.

The bank was in a small house, hardly bigger than a cottage, and the manager-cashier-teller used to open up for business on only two days of the week: Tuesdays and Thursdays. Everyone liked him in the village, for he made a practice of affability and what was sometimes called 'personal attention'. Nor did this affability come with any striving. In Staintree, he was merely a little-more-than-junior clerk; in Hasling, for two days a week, he held the acting rank of full manager, with no one above him, even if there were no one below him. This situation so warmed his heart that no one in Hasling had ever seen Mr. Chrimes other than polite, cheerful and attentive.

So now, as Phyllida took off her right-hand glove to pick up the five bank-notes that Mr. Chrimes slid delicately across the counter, he said:

'Not a very pleasant day for going to town, Mrs. Hammond, I'm afraid.'

'No, not very.'

'Rather damp, really. And,' a glance through the window above the half-blind of wire-mesh, 'we *could* have rain.'

'Yes. We could.'

'Still,' with his cheerful, yet oddly fugitive (and oddly wistful) professional smile, 'it's better to be in London than in Hasling on a rainy day.'

'It is indeed,' said Phyllida, tucking the money away in her note-case, along with the dry-cleaners' ticket and the receipt from the clock-repairers' and the library tickets. 'In any case, I haven't any choice.'

'Ah . . . ' said Mr. Chrimes, tenderly, respectfully grave. His face held that sort of look which would have done equally well in hearing that Phyllida was going shopping or was off to a funeral. It was his practice to come from behind the counter, after he had served a customer, and walk round to the front, so that he might see the customer to the door. Professional courtesy was not altogether the only inspiration of this practice: professional interest had something to do with it as well.

Mr. Chrimes was rather short-sighted, and by getting nearer to his client he might the more easily determine such important truths as that the clothes they wore were as expensive as they looked, that the jewellery that they wore was real, that the car which had brought them to the bank (not seen, save in blurred

outline, through the wire-mesh blind) did not bear the hackney-licence plate of Fred Turner, the local hire-car owner. Mr. Chrimes, though he was a married man, had somehow 'developed a nose for the more expensive scents ('perfuines', he called them); and he was able, even by catching a whiff of a lady-customer's scent, to make a fair guess at such details of her financial standing as were not to be deduced from her bank-statements.

He knew—though Phyllida had not told him—that a life of her husband was 'due shortly to appear'. This he had learnt in the simplest way: he had read it in 'News about Forthcoming Books' in *John o' London's Weekly*; a journal that Phyllida had never read.

He knew enough about the professional methods of publishers to know that it was their custom to pay an advance on expected royalties when signing a contract with authors, and though the life of Philip Hammond was, apparently, being written, not by his wife, but by an established author, Mr. Chrimes guessed that Phyllida must have helped with the preparation of the material, and been paid for that help. If not, how would she be in a position to order so expensive a memorial stone from Judkins? For Mr. Chrimes knew all about that, too.

So now, gravely lifting the flap of the counter, he came through into the what had once been a cottage-parlour, and stood deferentially while Phyllida, smiling, pulled on her glove, patted non-existent creases out of her coat and skirt, and gathered up her bag.

Mr. Chrimes was thinking:

If she has any more money than I know about, it must be in another account. I don't know what sort of advances publishers give; but she will only have got a proportion, however much was paid. On the other hand, as the widow of a writer, she probably knew enough of publishing not to be swindled. I wonder if she's going to get married again? She's a remarkably handsome woman. She ought to be able to get married again, without much trouble. And married well, this time.

Mr. Chrimes, bowing Phyllida through the door, hoped that she would bring her husband's account to the Hasling branch of the United Provincial Bank.

Warmed by Mr. Chrimes's obvious admiration no less than by the feeling of wealth that the presence of five pounds, eight shillings and twopence in her handbag gave her, Phyllida

came into Judkins's yard wishing that someone much—oh, much!—more important than the stone-mason might have been waiting to receive her.

Judkins was sitting on a piece of roughly hewn granite. He rose as Phyllida came into the yard. He said:

'Good morning, Miss. I'm glad you've come. I've had an offer or two for they pieces of yaller marble.'

Phyllida smiled to match the suit and hat and gloves and handbag. 'I'm so glad you told them to wait, Judkins, until I'd decided. But,' and the smile faded ever so slightly, 'I thought you'd *cut* the stone already, by now?'

Judkins stared. Took the pipe out of his mouth. Looked at it. Looked at Phyllida.

He said:

'Stone's been cut for some time, Miss.'

'Yes, but . . . this . . . your letter. . . '

Judkins rubbed his hand over his mouth.

'I've done the stone. *As* agreed. (And very nice it looks, too; though I say it.)'

'(I'm sure it does, Judkins.)'

'... And what I wrote to you about, Miss, hasn't got nothing to do with whether or not I cut the stone. (Though, 's a matter of fact, I have cut it.) What I wanted to know . . . Do you know the Houghton memorial in the church, Miss? Up on the left-hand side, as you go in; just where the nave divides from the chancel?'

'That . . . well: I don't know . . . D'you mean that Elizabethan thing, with the father and mother, and ten kneeling children? Is that it?'

Judkins said, with a sort of sombre triumph:

'Carrara and Giallo Antico. Same marbles, Miss, as I've got for you.'

Phyllida frowned a this-has-rather-taken-me-by-surprise frown. She began to say, 'Well, I'd have to think it over, Judkins'; but she had got no further than, 'Well, I'd . . . ' when Judkins said:

'*And* the memorial—that one with pillars and cupids—to Lord Ribblesford. *And* the one—the one with urns and cannons and a weepin' woman under a acacia tree (I know it's a acacia because I'm on the Square)—they put up for Admiral Sefton who was killed at the Battle of La Hogue. *And*—' here Judkins's little eyes positively blazed with triumph—'and if you say: "Ah well, Judkins, all that's

old-fashioned stuff!" what about Lady Riverton's memorial, put up 1928? Ah! Well, that's Carrara and Giallo Antico, with just the *least* touch, as you might say, of Travertine.

'No, Miss,' said Judkins to a Phyllida temporarily silent because her mind was full of something else, 'you can take it from me that the gentry have always had a fancy for Carrara and Giallo Antico. Take it from me they have. . . .'

Phyllida smiled. She knew that she was looking elegant enough that even Judkins had noticed it; and she could not feel it in her to be disputatious; much less rebuking. She said:

'Does all this mean, Judkins, that . . . tell me: just how far have you got? Is all the lettering cut?'

'You'll see it in a minute, Miss. Yes, the lettering's done.'

'So,' said Phyllida, still smiling, 'what you're trying to tell me is that you've made up the . . . the headstone and surround . . . with your wonderful Carrara and (what is it?) Giallo Antico? Oh, well. . . .'

Judkins took his pipe out of his mouth.

'Well, Miss not exactly *made up*. On'y put together, as you might say. We never cement the marble slips together until we're ready to finish the job. Still,' said Judkins, looking away at the elms by the bridge, 'it'll look very nice. At least, so Rector thinks. . . .'

'Ah!' said Phyllida, 'so that's what it's all about! I thought you . . . Why on earth, Judkins, you have to go all round to come to anything beats me!'

'I thought you'd be glad, Miss,' said the old man, mildly. 'You was a bit worrit how Rector'd take it, I remember.'

Phyllida said indignantly:

'Well, I like *that*! Of all the *nerve*! Why, it was *you*, Judkins, who brought up about Mr. Cartwright's having to approve. You *know* you did! Why, I never even knew that one needed *anyone's* permission to put up a memorial to one's relatives.'

'Ah, but you do, Miss,' said Judkins, gravely.

Phyllida said impatiently:

'Yes, yes, yes. I know you do. So Mr. Cartwright approves, eh?'

(But why didn't she experience a sense of relief? Why was there an odd sense of irritation, rather than of satisfaction?)

'Not only approves, Miss, but . . . Was you talking of the Carrara and Giallo Antico, or was you meanin' the inscription?'

'I meant the inscription, Judkins,' said Phyllida, sharply, 'and you know that perfectly well! He approves the inscription?'

'Absolutely, Miss.' The old man got laboriously to his feet, stuffing his pipe into a pocket of the unbuttoned waistcoat. 'Would you like to see how far we've got, Miss?' He led the way. 'Mind them puddles with them thin shoes of yours.'

That was to be the only evidence that Judkins had remarked her changed appearance; but she noticed how carefully he led the way so as to avoid what, had she been more ordinarily dressed, would have seemed no obstacles: mounds of sand and cement, pools of clay-yellowed water, prone ladders, pieces of damp and muddy sacking, lumps of unworked stone. Phyllida thought: *If this suit has this effect on old Judkins!* She was not surprised when, at the open door of his covered 'yard', Judkins turned and gave her his hand, so as to help her over the pool which covered the sunken doorstep.

'But. . . !' Phyllida said, following Judkins's pointing finger.

'Yes, Miss. That was Rector's idea, seeing as how we'd been lucky enough to get the extra marble slips. I hope you like it the way it is now. . . .'

Phyllida was conscious of a painful swelling of her heart. She did not know at all what she thought of the change in design. She had saved up for an ordinary headstone-and-curb, and now, little by little, Judkins (and the Rector?) had changed the whole design of the memorial. She said slowly—and as she said it, she became aware that there was more of pleasant surprise than disappointment in the feeling that the memorial aroused:

'But, Judkins . . . it's . . . it's so *grand*.'

'Ay, Miss!' said the old man, surveying his handiwork with a pride which made no attempt to conceal itself. 'Now that's as grand as anything you'll see in Hasling Old Church.'

'But . . . Judkins. I . . . I can't get over it. . . . It's so *grand*. It's so . . . well, magnificent.' She knew that she was delighted with the splendour of the contrasted marbles; of the sugar-white, the crocus-yellow and the dark grey-green of lavender. And, in some curious fashion, she felt the pleasure that she knew as being somehow connected both with the happiness that her new suit was inspiring in her and with the impulse which had made her change her old clothes. The *richness* of the memorial was so unexpected, and yet—in her present mood—so *right*, that she could only enjoy the warm delight with which this being brought so unexpectedly in contact with a more generous way of living was filling her. That was it!

'It's not *skimpy*, Judkins! It's . . . it's . . . oh, I don't know. It's . . .'

'As long as you're pleased, Miss?'

'Pleased, Judkins. . . ! Oh, dear!'

'I thought, for a moment . . .' said Judkins.

'Yes, because it was so unexpected to see it hung on the wall, instead of being on the ground.'

'Well now, Miss,' said Judkins, scratching his head under the old cloth cap, 'I expect you're wondering, won't we have to have *two* memorials, if this 'un's going up on the wall of Hasling Church?'

'Why, yes. I'd forgotten for the moment.'

'That's right,' said Judkins, in a somewhat furtive manner. 'Well, it was the Rector's idea to put the Squadron-Leader's memorial in the chancel, alongside of Admiral Sefton's and Lady Riverton's and Lord Chief Justice Baron Thwaklington's and Dean Preston-Carke's . . . In fact . . . well, all of them gentry. And . . . well, now,' with well-simulated astonishment, 'if here ain't Rector himself. Good morning, sir! I was just telling Miss—Mrs.—Hammond . . .'

The Rector's small, trim shape darkened the doorway.

He advanced (still much more the young Colonel, Phyllida thought, than even the young parson). His hand was outstretched; his mouth wide to show his excellent teeth. He had so many—nearly all, in fact—of the more obvious mannerisms of the fraud, that it was always something of a shock to have it proven to one how fundamentally sincere, how basically and unalterably honest, Tom Cartwright was.

Phyllida, remembering how hard it had been to convince her of this fact, thought that, all the same, there was a certain amount of by-play here, since the timing had been a little too pat to be quite above suspicion.

Mr. Cartwright had a hard, dry hand, with short, thin, very bony fingers. He shook her hand with a vigour unusual with most men, though not with him.

'My dear Mrs. Hammond! Well met! I see you are admiring our tablet!' And then, as though recollecting that even a startlingly handsome memorial tablet might still have some sad associations for the lady who had ordered it, he composed his dry, tight face into less cheerful lines, and said, in a manner almost confidential: 'Well . . . my opinion—for what it's worth: but I'd say that of all the notable—and worthy, too—notable and worthy people—commemorated on the walls of

my church—*our* church—there will be no one more to be honoured than your husband.'

Phyllida saw what convention—and Mr. Cartwright—~~expected~~ her to say. Instead, she said:

'Tell me, Mr. Cartwright, when did you decide that my—that Philip—qualified for a place on the wall among all Hasling's great, instead of the virtual anonymity of a place in the cemetery, among all the ordinary people?'

The Rector did not look confused; but it was obvious to Phyllida that he had not given the matter a thought. He frowned, biting his lower lip.

'I . . . well. Wait, Mrs. Hammond: you are asking me. . . ?'

He looked to her for guidance.

She said, slowly and distinctly:

'Judkins had to—or, at least, he *did*—come to you to . . . to . . . well . . .'

'To submit the inscription for my approval? Yes. Of course he did, Mrs. Hammond. Had he not done so; and had I had to disapprove,' the Rector said briskly, 'you would have lost your . . . Judkins would have had all his work for nothing. . . .'

'I should have lost my money,' said Phyllida, to abash him.

'You would have had a great disappointment,' said Mr. Cartwright, not in the least put out.

'Then,' said Phyllida, slowly, looking up at the lines of deep-cut, gilded letters, 'you *have* given your approval?'

'Not only that,' said the Rector, snapping thumb and finger in a very leave-it-to-me gesture, 'I suggested that we should ask your approval to—um!—place a memorial tablet *in* the church, instead of merely in the churchyard.' He glanced at Judkins, and Phyllida, seeing the look which passed between parson and stone-mason, knew that she had not heard all which was to be heard. However, the rest was not long a-coming.

Mr. Cartwright coughed. Now he did seem to be a little less sure of himself. He appeared to be almost nervous as he said:

'Well . . . yes. One other thing. But, first of all, I should have asked you: do *you* approve? You should have been asked that immediately. Immediately.'

'I—? Oh, yes,' said Phyllida, with a shrug. 'I approve all right. Yes . . . of course I do. Poor Philip,' she said, looking at the tablet; 'he never could have expected *this*. . . .'

'Well, then,' said the Rector, cheerfully, 'that's fine. Fine.'

And still there was that impression that that hadn't been quite all that he had wanted to say.

Phyllida said, her colour deepening a little, 'Mr. Cartwright'—she glanced at Judkins—'I . . . I'm very touched. I . . .' and her voice broke a little, ' . . . I wasn't expecting anything as . . . as *grand* as this. I . . .'

'Yes . . . yes . . . Well . . . it is rather fine. (You've done a fine job, Judkins!) But . . . well, nothing's too good for . . .'

'Mr. Cartwright,' Phyllida screwed up her courage to say; 'it isn't that at all. I do like Philip—I mean, I *would* like Philip to have the most wonderful, the most magnificent memorial tablet that I could afford. But . . . but . . .'

Her voice trailed off, and the two men saw what she knew, that she was on the verge of tears. The Rector said gently, 'But what, Mrs. Hammond?'

Phyllida gulped, and fished in her handbag.

'I said, "that I could afford". I . . . I would . . . I mean: what I wanted was a headstone. And a curb. And . . .'

The Rector glanced at Judkins.

'Ah, yes, Mrs. Hammond. Well now . . . yes, I see. Um! Well . . . you mean that you couldn't afford to have both the headstone *and* the tablet in the church?'

'Yes . . . that's what I do mean. I,' and now it was Phyllida who glanced at the silent, watchful Judkins, 'I can manage *one*. But . . .'

'Yes, of course. Yes . . . yes. Quite. Perfectly understandable.'

'I haven't all *that* money,' said Phyllida, wishing for the first time that she hadn't changed out of her old clothes. 'It was . . . well, it's taken me a long time to save enough. . . .'

She shook her head slowly, and put the handkerchief that she had found to the end of her nose.

The Rector laid a hard, gentle hand on her shoulder.

'Mrs. Hammond! You are not to worry.'

She raised tear-drowned eyes to his.

'No. . . ?'

He smiled.

'No. If we have your permission, there will be need for only one memorial stone.'

'*One* . . . ? But what about the . . . the *grave*?'

This time the Rector did not look at Judkins. He looked straight at Phyllida, as though challenging her to deny him the right to know what was best—for all. He said:

'That's just it, Mrs. Hammond. That's what I meant just now, when I said we should have to have your permission.

You thought I meant, permission to erect the tablet in the church.'

And suddenly Phyllida saw what he had been trying to say for minutes past.

She said—and, try as she would, she could not keep the horror out of her voice:

'You . . . you want to *move* Philip?'

'The Rector said, firmly:

'He *deserves* to lie within the body of the church. . . .'

She shook her head; her eyes wide; her handkerchief pressed to her mouth:

'Oh, no! Oh . . . I couldn't . . . I . . . Oh, no!'

The Rector said quietly:

'It would be done at . . . at night. Very, very quietly. There would be no disturbance of the . . . of the remains.'

'I think it's *awful*!' said Phyllida.

'But we *honour* him . . . Mrs. Hammond, don't you *realize* that. . . ?'

Phyllida turned and faced the tablet. A thin sunshine had swept through the open door, and the fresh gold-leaf of the lettering, caught obliquely in the pale radiance, blazed against the sombre tint of the stone. She said, 'Read it aloud, Mr. Cartwright.'

It was an order—and he accepted it as such. He read aloud:

IN PROUD AND LOVING MEMORY
OF
SQUADRON-LEADER PHILIP ARMITAGE HAMMOND
D.S.O., D.F.C. AND BAR, OFFICER OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR,
OFFICER OF THE ROYAL NETHERLANDS ORDER OF THE
MARGUERITE, CROIX-DE-GUERRE

As he was recovering from wounds sustained in active combat with the enemy, he was wantonly and treacherously killed on July 31st, 1944.

A stick of bombs was dropped on the unarmed and defenceless village in which he was recovering his health, and besides Squadron-Leader Hammond, 82 persons, including 61 children at school, were murdered to uphold the German nation's unassailable and jealously guarded reputation for criminal brutality.

This stone is erected by his widow, not only in memory of her beloved husband, but in remembrance also of all who died at the hands of his murderers.

May All the Innocent Victims of Terror Rest in Peace.

Phyllida felt the old hatred coming back. It was good to be strengthened with hate, where one could not be strengthened with love.

She realized, with a pang of shame, how far she had come from burning, bitter remembrance; how near she had come, in the years which had passed, to forgetfulness—to that something worse than forgetfulness: the taking for granted of detestable happenings, just because they *have* happened. The oh-well-it's-all-over-now attitude. . . .

She had been in London when it had happened; and no matter that people used to say, 'But didn't you have some sort of *premonition*. . . ?' there had been no premonition. She had bought Philip a cardigan at Austin Reed's: she childishly—or, at least, young-girlishly—happy, excited, because, for the first time since things had gone under the counter, she had found a garment which seemed to be of pre-war quality. And only five pounds. . . .

Then she had had tea at Prentice's, and the quality of the cakes hadn't come up to the quality of the cardigan. Still . . . that was the war; and Phyllida had felt so happy to have got Philip something that he *really* wanted, and would *really* like, that she hadn't minded the margarine and the queer taste of the 'pastries' and the oddly unoriental flavour of the 'China' tea.

And what was making her the happier—the more excited—was that she knew that under this immediate, this surface happiness, which had been inspired by the lucky finding of something for once worth buying, was a deeper, a more general and lasting happiness: the happiness of knowledge not only that Philip was nearly better physically, but that the deep spiritual and moral change wrought in him by the fundamentally altered conditions of the war looked to have become permanent. If ever a man (she would always remember thinking) had changed—had been able to change—that man was Philip Hammond.

The black-out, the rationing, the queues, the thousand inconveniences and deprivations: what did these really matter, when the war had made a *man* out of the human being that she must have loved (otherwise, how could she have married him?) but whom she had for too long thought incapable of earning her respect?

How clearly—looking at the shining letters so sharply, so boldly cut—she remembered her assured dreams as she sat at the small table by the window in Prentice's: the small table

shared with a young Sapper officer with his girl, and an old lady with black lace and palsy.

Normandy had been invaded. Everyone knew what that meant. That was the beginning of the end, even if not—for the moment—the end itself.

The Germans were now in the position that they had struggled so desperately to avoid: fighting on two fronts. The war *must* be entering on its final stages, whether it were to end in Germany's total surrender or in her total annihilation.

They had been wonderful days, when, at last, one had dared to let oneself—for the first time since the collapse of France—hope as one of the potentially victorious instead of as one of the almost certainly doomed.

The camera-reel of those frightening days just before Dunkirk was now running backwards. History was repeating itself—but in reverse. The old familiar names of Northern France—the names that familiarity had rendered terrible only four years earlier—were reappearing in the news: those names which, in the headlines, had once made the customary black of printer's-ink take on the grim significance of mourning for a doomed civilization.

'As he was recovering from wounds sustained in active combat . . .'

The gilded letters seemed to leap out of the even lines of the inscription. 'As he was recovering . . .'

Phyllida remembered.

.. For a long time, between the removing of the bandages—the *first lot* of bandages—and the third of the plastic operations that Sir Harold Gillies had performed, Philip had refused to be 'seen'.

He had written:

I know this sounds—must look—like the most awful male vanity; but the face is important far and away beyond any question of attracting others. (Though I never thought of my face as *attracting* you! It's only now that I think of what I must have looked like as having some importance.) But the face is terribly important in our dealings with others—and, for Heaven's sake, don't look sulky (or outraged!) and say, But I'm *not* OTHERS. In a way, you're more Others than Others: I mean that you're more important to me than Others could ever possibly be. Which is why you're not—and never could be—Others. If I thought that this scarring—and it's

pretty awful, I can tell you!—were going to be permanent, I should take my courage in my hands, and say to hell with my vanity, and chance my arm with your—what?—Heart? Compassion? Or just healthy common sense? That I think. But they assure me here— not only Sir Harold, but all of them: high-ups and not-so-high-ups—that I shall be so beautiful. Not just not disguised as something sub-human; but positively beautiful. With a most marvellous skin. (The Sort You Love To Touch!) I never know whether or not to believe them. I sometimes think they're just dishing out a lot of bull on the kind-to-be-cruel principle, and then I think of Gusher Tadworth, and what he looked like Before and After. They even grew his curly hair again—God knows how. (And, perhaps, it is because God really knows how that they can do it. And certainly only God could give all these people the immense *charity* which strengthens them, and makes them what those who have never had to be helped by them call hard, callous, what you will. I've lain here for hours and hours, just thinking of what each person here, from the lowliest wardmaid to the Lord High Panjandrum, must have had to find, of inward resources, before he or she was able to begin to do anything for anyone else. I could only confess in a letter, when I want you so badly, or after having made love to you in a specially tender way, how not only abashed, but even abased, these people have made me feel. And not only some of the time: pretty nearly all the time. I do pray that my sentiments will last; that there's no infernal Third Law of Motion in such refinements of understanding; that I won't react violently against the understanding of my own pettiness, and my ignorance that there was a practical goodness in this world, being exercised all the time—wherever there was a hospital, for a start.) That was a long parenthesis: the publisher would have cut it out. But I'm not writing for the public now: I'm writing for you; which is why I can go on using the colons that Greaves particularly hated. (Too “eighteenth-century altogether, my dear Hammond!) So . . . where was I? (Just a moment, please, while I refer back to my notes! Ah, yes . . . here we are!) Gusher Tadworth: so called because he has the barbarous habit of spitting (literally) in one's eye when he gets excited—which is pretty often, I should imagine. A tall Australian youth, with a pale, thick, healthy skin, and the curiously thick, wavy hair that so many of the Aussies—especially the ones from Perth—seem to have. I don't want to make your stomach heave, so I shan't describe Gusher's appearance, just after they had taken off the first bandages. I never got used to it; but that wasn't the point. It wasn't the disgust—the horror—that his face (what was left of it) inspired in me which made contact with him so difficult. I think (I don't know, mind you, but I *think* so) that I might have got used to it. Maybe, maybe not. What was so terrible was that I had to force myself to try to speak to him as a human being—to

think of him as a human being—*when he didn't look like one*. I remember hearing—I think it was somewhere around 1930—of a talking dog. Someone told me—I wonder how true it was? (I don't see how it could have been, now I come to think of it)—that she (yes, Phyll, it *was* a she!) had been to see this prodigy at the Palladium or the Holborn Empire or the Coliseum or some such place. And I remember how well she—I *told* you it was a she, and you haven't the slightest excuse for being jealous of her—how well she conveyed to me the horror that she felt when the *wrong thing* happened. Dogs should bark, and human beings should speak articulately and rationally. If she was making it up, she did it damned well. That, I must admit, was the sort of horror with which Gusher used to inspire *me*. I couldn't look away, and I couldn't look *at* him—even though I knew that he, mercifully, couldn't—*couldn't*—know how fearful he looked. But—and back we come to it—it was the *complete* lack of even a superficial resemblance to humanity which was so frightening. It wasn't like hearing a dog talk, it was like hearing a—no, I *mustn't*! I *mustn't*. But . . . well, you should see Gusher now! He's been out once or twice, and he's so excited at the prospect of being able to seduce almost any woman he claps eyes on that they'll probably have to move him to a different sort of hospital when he leaves here—one for the treatment of acute sexual mania. (I hope that won't happen to me!)

But, later, he had written:

When I was fifteen, I had the—yes, looking back, I know it was—the greatest thrill of my life. I had been so used to being lugged off to the school-outfitting department at Harrods that I'd given up all interest in what I would have liked to wear—if, indeed, I'd ever got as far as having an interest. And then, suddenly, my father decided that I could have a suit more or less made for me. At least, I was invited to choose the cloth, and generally express a preference for, say, single-breasted over double-breasted, and blue over the eternal grey. I shall never forget my wonder when I realized that I was being given my choice; and the dreams which came crowding into my head as I took in all the implications of the invitation. What I wasn't going to have! The other day—I didn't tell you about this at the time—some photographs arrived that we'd been hunting for. I knew you'd probably have them, but I wasn't going to ask you. It was a bit of a sweat, finding the various photographers, and we certainly didn't find them all. Some had gone into one of the Services, some had been killed, some had just disappeared, and some, though alive and available, had had all their stock destroyed. Added to the fact that that vanity—'conceit' was your word, I recall, you b.i.t.c.h.!—you used to complain about never took me very often to the photographer's. It was mostly

newspaper and magazine stuff we were after. To be used to augment and correct the evidence of the photograph on my identity card. But that brings me back to the suit. Sir Harold's tame artists got cracking on all these strangely differing snaps, and if they say that the camera doesn't lie, why the hell should daylight and photographic emulsion make me look like Gary Cooper one day and Crippen the next? But Sir Harold's pet Rembrandts understand all this, and I don't know, but I suppose I shall have to confess that I got at least the same sort of thrill, when I was asked to choose my face, as I got when I was asked to choose the cloth and the cut of my first made-to-measure suit. All sorts of wonderful ideas went chasing through my head. If I couldn't help thinking that Sir Harold, at moments like this, must feel like God on the morning of Creation, I still couldn't help feeling, myself, like Michael being shown the prelims. I know that I ought to have taken a Warts-and-All attitude, but the fact is that I didn't, and—talking of warts—that mole, I'm afraid, can't be repeated. I'm told that plastic surgery hasn't quite got around to moles yet—but it's doing its best! I retire, therefore, tomorrow, to the operating theatre, for the first step towards making me as lovely as Gusher . . .

Phyllida had often wondered how bad it had *really* been; for, when at last Philip had permitted her to come down to the hospital to see him, she discovered that she had screwed herself up to expect and to face something far, far worse than the reality.

'Why,' she had said, through her tears, 'it isn't a *bit* awful. It isn't a *bit* . . . Why you . . . you look . . . you look almost a *man* now, darling. . . .'

He hadn't laughed. He had frowned, though not from annoyance.

He had said:

'Well, then . . . they *have* made a good job of it. I . . . I didn't realize that. . . .'

'Well,' said Phyllida, not knowing quite what to say, 'I'm hardly in a position to know that, am I? I mean: it looks all right *now*, if that's what you're worrying about. . . .'

Something of that first meeting after his crash was clear in Phyllida's remembrance, and something of it was blurred, as though she had used her eyes principally. That is, to remember with.

And her eyes had been so often blurred as she had looked at him, remembering now how young his smooth face had always looked.

Yes, the surgeons had been clever—if they had had to do as

much as Philip had hinted; though here, as in other things, he had probably allowed that self-dramatization which sprang from an essential preoccupation with himself to run away with his sense of proportion.

But some things she remembered clearly. Very clearly, the look on the nurse's face: an odd look, compounded in about equal parts of lively interest and something which was nearly, if not altogether, contempt.

Phyllida knew why. The interest was in someone whom Philip had dramatized, rather than merely praised. (It was one of Philip's most infuriating habits, Phyllida used to think, to talk well of her only behind her back. But behind her back, he over-praised; while, with her, he seemed to have a curious reluctance to say 'nice things' to her.) And the contempt was for a woman who had left her husband alone to undergo all the weeks of ante- and post-operational anxiety and pain. No matter that the nurse had certainly been told—told and told and told; time and time again—that Phyllida was staying away by his insistent request.

The nurse was thinking: A fine sort of wife—to pay any *attention* to a request like that!

Now, staring at the tablet on the wall of Judkins's shed, Phyllida was thinking, *I should have paid no attention. I should have gone to him, whether or not he liked it. I should have spent every minute with him. Every minute. . . .*

The sense of loss was unbearable; the sense of wasted opportunity intolerable. Her mind began to busy itself with odd pictures of what she ought to have done. She saw herself lying awake in a bed made up on the floor alongside his hospital-cot. She saw herself asking for, and receiving permission, to stay beside him even during the surgeons' and the matron's rounds. Special permission to keep the light on, to stay with him all night: talking, talking, talking. . . . Finding out all about him; going ever more deeply and lovingly into the secret places of his heart. Opening her own to him. . . .

He would never have gone back to the old life! Phyllida thought, in the bitter contemplation of the irrevocable and the irreparable.

She understood the faults now; for she saw their causes. She compared the Philip of the war years with the Philip of the

days before 1939; and she saw why they were different men. Because the circumstances had changed.

She understood now what he had so often tried to make her understand: the terrible frustration of his free-lance's life, where no obstacles were placed, *at first*, in the way of a man's working, but almost every obstacle, it seemed, in the way of his earning even a living wage. And, by and by, that obstacle in the way of earning money became an obstacle in the way of working.

The shame of not being able to provide for her. The shame of having to stand aside while she asked others—her family, his family, friends—to help out, while his 'brilliance' was trying to accommodate itself to the harshly uncompromising economics of an essentially unbrilliant world. Phyllida could understand the shame now . . . and the near-despair that, at times, it produced.

She remembered how it had irritated her that Philip had seemed so *serious* when he had spoken of wishing that he were Jack Chaxton, who wrote interminably for *Susie's Mag*—reams and reams and reams of illiterate balderdash at three guineas a thousand, so that he could say that he made a steady three thousand a year.

'Oh, but Philip, you wouldn't want to write *that* stuff. . . !'

'Oh, but *I* would. . . ! I really *would*. What the deuce does it matter what sort of stuff you write, if it sells? And what on earth does it matter if you write stuff that the critics rave about, and the public won't touch at any price? As,' he had added, with a sort of sniffing laugh for all his review-based hopes, 'they won't touch mine?'

'I feel like *shaking* you,' she had said. 'When you talk like that, I can't see *anything* for us. Anything.'

* He had said, 'seriously':

'Look, Phyll: it's no good shutting our eyes to facts. It's absurd to say that I don't write better than Jack Chaxton does. You don't imagine for one moment, do you, that I don't know—as well as Jack and his editor do—that what he writes is tripe?'

'Yes, but . . .'

'My pet, there's no "yes, but . . ." about it. Jack writes tripe, because that's what he's paid to write. He has a nice steady job writing tripe at twenty thousand words a week, for fifty-two weeks in the year, at the top rate the Consolidated Press pay: three guineas a thousand. A million words a year,

at three guineas. That's—I don't know, but—well, say three thousand five hundred quid. Wouldn't you like that? I jolly well know I would!

Well, of course, Phyllida had understood his being 'serious' when he talked of wishing that he had three thousand a year—or even one thousand. What she could not understand—perhaps because she did not wish to understand—was that he should wish her to think him 'serious' when he said that he envied Jack, not his income alone, the steadiness of his job, his freedom from the worries which must pester and distract less established writers, but Jack's capacity to write 'tripe'.

'You can't be serious, Philip. . . .'

'Oh, but I am. . . .'

'But you couldn't write that stuff if you tried.'

His answer, she remembered, had astonished her. (Would she ever find out all about him?—she remembered thinking that, too.)

'Oh, but I know that very well. You see . . . ' with a sort of cynical lightness which belied the look in his eyes—'I've tried.'

She had shaken her head, frowning as she looked him straight in the eyes.

'You . . . Word of honour. . . .?'

'Word of honour. Why shouldn't you believe me?'

'I . . . I don't know. I . . . well, I *don't* know. . . .'

'Can't you believe that I could ever stoop so low? Or . . . or can't you believe that even my efforts at *She Was Ashamed Of Her Mother* or *His Tibetan Wife* were turned down. . . .?'

'Why were they turned down? Were they too well written?'

'They *said* so.'

'I expect they were.'

'But that wasn't the reason.'

'Was this before you knew me . . . or after?'

'After.'

'You never told me. . . .'

'I got hold of the envelope before you managed to see it. Consolidated Press always have their name printed on the envelope.'

Phyllida stood staring at the tablet, remembering how she had shaken her head, and said:

'Why do you hide things from me, Philip? Why? Why *do* you?'

He had said, smiling a little sadly:

'Only the unpleasant things, Phyll. . . .' And had added, with that smile deepening and growing even sadder: 'Or are you going to say, they're the only things that ever come through the post these days?'

'Why did you hide it from me, Philip? Why *did* you?' She had come near to him, and caught the lapels of his jacket in tight fists. 'Don't you think I'm to be trusted to—well—face bad things? Tell me! Tell me! No . . . you must tell me, Philip!

'Don't look away like that! This is serious, Philip. Deadly serious. How can you *expect* me to trust you, when you *hide* things from me?'

He had got angry then, she remembered. The same old Philip anger—man's anger—which was only another aspect of the eternal desire, on man's part, to see only what was nice. Not very different, that anger, from the laziness which was also characteristic of him—of most men: that laziness, that indolence, that inertia which could refuse to do anything about anything, in the hope that matters would put themselves to rights if neglected long enough. It was an indolence which angered her; but the anger left her cold. She knew what it meant. But he had said, she remembered:

'You'd think, Phyll, that you'd *wormed* it out of me! That you'd found it out without my wishing you to have done so. . . . That I hadn't told you of my own free will. You'd think . . .'

'Look, Philip,' she had said, in her 'reasonable' voice, which didn't (she knew) always madden him, 'I can't make distinctions between concealments. Either I'm your wife, and a grown woman, and I'm fit to be told everything—no matter how bad the news—or I'm just a mistress—and a childish one at that—for whom the news has got to be censored. Now, what's it to be?'

Yes . . . that had maddened him. He had almost—but not quite—shouted:

'*Phyll!* I've never heard such damned nonsense in my life! No'—working himself up—'and such damned *unfair* nonsense.'

'It isn't nonsense. Any *wife* would tell you the same. . . .'

'It is nonsense, Phyll,' he had said, taking a firm hold upon the elusively slippery tail of his self-control. 'What would have been the good of telling you that Consolidated had turned down a . . . an experiment?'

'I should have known. That would have been better than not knowing.'

'Will you tell me why?'—as though she couldn't possibly have been expected to have been able to tell him why.

'Well . . . For one thing, I might have been able to suggest, either why they'd turned it down, or another market. . . .'

He had said, with a shrug of his shoulders and a deep sigh, 'I . . . I know why they turned it down. There's no mystery about *that*. . . .'

'Oh?'

'Yes,' he had said, suddenly calm and not a bit angry; 'they turned it down because I hadn't written the rubbish to tell a story, however childish; because I hadn't written it to amuse people who are amused by that sort of tripe; because I hadn't done what Jack does—tried to earn the applause and the gratitude of readers for whom this sort of literature is what Stalin's speeches must be to Harry Pollitt. What I had done was to try to *use* Ramsden, of Consolidated, for my own purposes, without giving Ramsden or his readers a thought. And Ramsden's no fool, for all he's been buying that muck since about 1900. They don't like being used. Well . . . does anyone?' He had added: 'Serve me right. . . .'

Then, she remembered, she had caught his wrists, and pulled his head down on to her breast. She remembered how she had kissed the top of his head, as she caught him to her in a hurting ecstasy of compassion.

'You fool!' she had said, again and again, as she had kissed his hair. 'You fool! You silly darling! You awful fool. . . .'

Squadron-Leader Philip Armitage Hammond, D.S.O., D.F.C. . . .

She stared at the words, as Cartwright said:

'I was wondering . . . Did your husband . . . I mean: do you know . . . I'm sorry: I'm getting this all mixed up. . . .',

Phyllida did not turn away from her meditative contemplation of the memorial tablet as she said:

'Yes, Mr. Cartwright: what is it I can tell you?'

'Well'—as though embarrassed by his clumsy way of approaching the subject of Philip's breeding—'had your husband a coat of arms?' And very quickly, to explain: 'I was thinking that there is ample space over his name. . . .'

'I don't know,' said Phyllida. 'But old Mrs. Hammond would know. . . .'

'It'd match up nice with all them other memorials in church,' said Judkins, stuffing his old pipe. 'And I could

colour it up proper, like the coat of arms on Sir Martin Westerby's tablet: him what sacked the plate-fleet off Cape Fear. Ah, I could do that proper nice. . . .

'If it's the one I'm thinking of, Judkins,' said the Rector, 'I seem to remember it's alabaster, that memorial. . . .'

'Well, so it is, Rector.'

'Colours which showed up well on alabaster wouldn't show up so well on granite, surely? Mark you, I'm not posing as an expert: but it did rather occur to me. . . .'

'So long's you gesso the stone before you laid on the colour,' said Judkins, 'you'd get a more vivid-like effect on a dark stone than you would on a white. Sort of contrast, like. . . .'

'Yes, I see what you mean,' said the Rector; not because he did, but because he had begun to fear that he had started Judkins upon one of his technical expositions, which were inclined to last even longer than his political explanations. 'I'm sure you're right, Judkins. . . .'

'Ah, I know I am,' said Judkins, comfortably. 'Now, if Miss Phyllida was to ask about that 'ere coat of arms, I could cut it in the tympanum of this 'ere arch. . . .'

'*Tympanum*, Judkins!' the Rector said, with only the faintest tinge of jealousy in his voice (since such learned expressions were not, he felt, for the likes of Judkins). 'And where did you acquire that word, Judkins? You are no architect, are you?'

Judkins said, unperturbed:

'On the tympanum of *our* church is a thirteenth-century fresco, showing St. Dionysian the Areopagite and St. Simeon Stylites, on both sides of Jesus Christ in a glory. That's correct, sir, ain't it?' said Judkins, with a slow, complacent smile.

'Perfectly,' said the Rector, trying hard to return the smile—or, at least, not to show his irritation with it. 'Perfectly. . . .'

'Professor Tristram. . . I take it you've heard of Professor Tristram, Rector? Gentleman who cleaned up the tester over Black Prince's tomb at Canterbury, uncovered the frescoes at Rochester, and goodness knows where else. . . .?'

'I've certainly heard of Professor Tristram. Who hasn't? But. . . do you mean to say that Professor Tristram uncovered the fresco on the tympanum of our church, Judkins?'

Judkins leaned forward, to tap out his pipe against his thick, clumsy boot. He was smiling.

'No,' he said, in his slow voice, 'I did, Rector.'

'*You?*' The Rector could not keep the amazement—the disbelief—out of his tone. '*You*, Judkins?'

'Me, sir. I picked up a book of—well, it wasn't *written* by the Professor, but it gives a whole account-like of his work, and the way he set about things, like. And I read this 'ere little book, and then I says to myself, Judkins, I says, take a little stroll around our church, and see how old you'd take it to be like.'

'And did you?'

'Ar. And I could see that nothing much hadn't been done to it in the way of repairs-like, since it was built. So I says, I lay they just give our frescoes a lick of whitewash when Cromwell's men was on the prowl: another lick on the one they give when the first Cromwell's men was on the prowl a hundred year earlier.

'And so I got Mr. Tillotson's permission, which was Rector before the one before *you*, sir. And Mr. Tillotson, he says, "Well, Judkins, if you say you've read this 'ere book, and you know something of the technique, as they call it, I can't see no great harm in your having a try to get that whitewash off." And so,' said Judkins, simply, 'that's what I did. With me palette knife, flake by flake, I got it off. And that, Rector, is how I come to know the word, *tympanum*.'

The Rector glanced at Phyllida. He thought, *We really shouldn't be yapping away like this. But she seems to be miles away.*

She was.

She was thinking, *Squadron-Leader Philip Armitage Hammond, D.S.O., D.F.C.* And then, for no reason at all, *the dead travel fast.*

She said, 'Do you know, now I come to think of it, I'm sure Philip had a coat of arms. Well . . . a crest, anyway. He had a signet-ring with a crest on it. . . .'

'If he had a crest, Mrs. Hammond,' said Mr. Cartwright, 'then it follows he would have had a coat of arms. The two things go together.'

'Do they? I'm afraid I'm not much up in heraldry. But if he had a coat of arms, his mother will know. I'll ask her. . . .'

It was no good, Phyllida thought: she couldn't take the slightest interest in anything but the tablet itself. Or rather, what was on the tablet.

She realized that she had never had any interest in the tablet, save as the means by which she could make her bitter protest against—against what? The Germans? Fate? Or even God Himself, Who seems at times to be so very inhuman?

Phyllida said to herself, *I hope he knows I haven't let him down!*

And then she began to wonder what Philip would have put on *her* memorial tablet, had she been the one to go first.

She could so easily have gone. There was that night—when was it?—May 10th, when she looked out of her top-floor window and saw that she was as ringed with fire as Brünnhilde; but—it seemed at the moment—with no magic to save her. And the morning that the bomb fell in Pall Mall, and blew her car around the corner nearly into Lock's window. And the night the train was machine-gunned at St. Pancras, and the window of the carriage suddenly frosted as a bullet hit it glancingly. Yes, she could so easily have gone first . . . and then there would have been no Phyllida for Philip to have kept bad news from.

She knew, remembering, that she would never have cured him of his habit of concealment, that he would persist in seeing as a sort of slightly dishonest tenderness on his part. But . . . there might so well have come a time when there would have been no bad news to conceal. For, if he hid the bad news—even though so clumsily it touched her heart sometimes to know that he believed that she did not know that he was concealing *something*; and mostly she could guess what that something was—how quickly he came running to her with the good news. The good news which could rescue him from despair, could restore his self-respect, his faith in his powers; could even, at times, turn his head rather dangerously and sometimes make him make a damned fool of himself.

Squadron-Leader Philip Armitage Hammond . . .

Well, thought Phyllida, that was where I was wrong. . . .

But how could one tell that a person so consistently wrong was being right for once? Phyllida remembered how the obstinacy with which Philip had stuck to his 'week-end' flying had at first irritated and then worried her. She had grown even more worried when she had proved to herself that Philip wasn't using his flying—his going off to fly, rather—as an excuse to meet some woman. There had been no woman.

'It's just an excuse to go drinking with all your dear old pals!' Phyllida used often to allow herself to say. But it hadn't been true, and Phyllida knew that it hadn't been true.

Philip drank, of course; but not more than a lot of people did; and his hangovers were extraordinarily severe, so that he was more careful of getting drunk than many other people had need to be. A weak stomach served him better than moral strength might have served others.

He could fall into moods of indolence, from which nothing seemed to have the power to shake him; but in matters connected with his flying he was the model of diligence. He would, Phyllida used to complain, ruin his eyes, reading all those tables and things in bed; and when he'd ruined his eyesight, all the hours spent learning whatever it was he was learning would be so much waste, wouldn't they?

Philip used not to answer this; and Phyllida used to go to sleep against the arm which was holding up Pettifer's *Astronavigation* or Semplemore's *Trigonometry for Air-pilots*. Things like that.

The dogged obstinacy that he showed in training himself to be a really first-class pilot-navigator! He had always been rather a duffer at maths; but as soon as his weakness in this branch of knowledge showed itself as a threat to his—well, it was a hobby then, whatever Fate made it later—he enrolled himself in a correspondence course, following that with thrice-weekly attendance at an L.C.C. night-class; finally paying ten shillings an hour for some special high-powered cramming at a famous tutor's near Victoria.

'Can we afford all this. . . ?' Phyllida used to ask, knowing that they couldn't. 'But' it seemed so strange: not that Philip should spend money on himself—he could always do that so long as he were by himself, with no one to remind his tender heart that he had duties to others—but that he should spend it consciously, deliberately, in the face of that opposition which, in any other circumstances, would have made his firmest decision shaky.)

'Do you realize what—never mind about the jaunts down to Biggin Hill—but do you realize what your books alone cost? You won't—why *don't* you get them out of the library? Tell me that!'

'They're not novels, Phyll. They're reference books. They're not novels, to be read once and returned to the library. I have to look at them all the time!'

'You're telling me!' She had not been able to resist the sneer.

He had shrugged, inflexible in his determination; so inflexible that he did not need the anger that he used, in weaker manifestations of himself, to cloak the sickening sense of insecurity, the terrifying knowledge that his will was almost always at the mercy of another's most lightly expressed wish.

But here he was master of his will. He had said:

'I'm sorry, Phyll, but . . . well, I have to have these books and things. . . '

'But why, why, why? What is this tremendous interest you've got in flying? What's the *point* of it? Are you getting ready for the next war? Is that it?'

'I would be ready, though, wouldn't I, if it *did* come?'

'I suppose so. But why: is there going to be another war?'

'I don't know. I hope not.'

She had stared at him in astonishment.

'Do you mean to say you don't think there will be?'

He had seemed unaware of her astonishment, or, at least, unaware of its cause. He had said, as though it didn't matter a lot:

'Well, frankly, I don't pay much attention to that sort of thing. Lord Rothermere says that Germany is re-arming at a fearful rate, and . . .'

'Oh, damn and blast Lord Rothermere! What do *you* think?'

'Well, frankly, I don't know. I haven't thought about it. . . .'

Phyllida had bitten her lower lip. Then she had said, with a sort of Oh-God-make-me-patient calm:

'Do you mean to say you have spent enough money to have paid the rent—on tuition and books and clearing off at week-ends to fly—and sat up half the night with your nose stuck into a book, until you've made yourself so tired you're way behind with the Lord Lynedoch book. . . . Do you mean to tell me that you've done all that, and you don't even think there's going to be a war?'

'I . . . You baffle me, Philip: honestly you do! I got some sort of consolation, thinking you had some bee in your bonnet there was going to be another war, and that you had better be prepared. But . . . well, if you don't think there's any likelihood of another war in the near future, what on earth are you studying for as though you're out to win a scholarship?'

'I . . . I just want to know how to fly,' was all that he could think of saying.

'Then why don't you take a short-service commission, and earn money while other people are paying your tuition fees?'

'I wouldn't like that very much, I think,' Philip had said.

'And why, pray?' Phyllida had asked.

'It would interfere with my writing,' Philip had said.

Remembering, Phyllida could see that even Philip felt that the answer was hardly a satisfactory one.

There might have been some small consolation in the fact that Philip looked very well in uniform had Phyllida been the

sort of woman who finds a man's attractiveness dependent upon his appearance. But Phyllida had always thought that Philip had no need to pay overmuch attention to his dress. He was—well, perhaps not *good-looking*, so much as *nice-looking*. Anyhow, it wasn't for his looks or his way of wearing clothes that Phyllida had fallen in love with him.

I wonder why I did fall in love with him? Phyllida found herself wondering, remembering the fuss that he had made over letting her see his re-made face. *Why do men always think their face is so important?*

Of course, Phyllida hadn't come away from the hospital thinking any of the things that (she knew) Philip would be expecting her to be thinking.

Mingled with her deep gratitude that Philip would not go through life disfigured—or, at least, as she estimated disfigurement (she rather felt that Philip was not so satisfied with the plastic surgery as was she)—was a sentiment of anger against the circumstances which had caused Philip so much physical and mental suffering; and since it was the latter sentiment which soon became the dominant, Phyllida soon became aware that she had decided that, for one man at least, the war was over; that Philip had done his bit; and that all her powers of persuasion would now be employed to ensure that he put himself in no more danger.

Let him stay at home. Let him have finished with war. Let him use his new character, his new strength, his new manliness, his new purposiveness, for himself. For both of them.

The nation, civilization, mankind, the Free World (what were names, anyway, but names?); these had had more than enough from Philip—and if their demands had given him something in his satisfying them, well, what of it? He had still not been repaid, in full—or even in part—for what he had given.

Each had been aware of the reserve which had sprung up between them since they had last met; it seemed as though, in breaking down barriers in his correspondence, Philip had somehow managed to erect new ones in his personal contact with his wife. But each realized that the inevitably different attitudes that each must take towards Philip's facial reconstruction (it was nothing less, in fact) must inevitably raise problems for both. You would have thought, Phyllida

remembered reflecting, that Philip—once he knew that the scars and curious redness didn't mean a *thing* to me, would have put the matter of his lost beauty out of his mind; forgotten about it.

But that he hadn't been able to forget his altered appearance; that he thought that it mattered—to her; meant that, basically, he did not trust her. But that, she had thought, is my problem to solve. If he doesn't trust me, it isn't the fault of his innate suspiciousness, which is only a product of his innate secretiveness; it's my fault. I haven't exactly failed him—because he's still willing to be shown how to trust me. He *wants* me to show him how to trust, not only me, but everyone who's worth the trusting.

Not that Philip didn't confide—but that was a different matter. He would confide in anyone, provided always that that anyone was the wrong sort of person to receive confidences—especially Philip's.

But as for trusting . . . Phyllida used to wonder how far back a psychiatrist would have to go, how deep he would have to probe, to find out the prime cause of Philip's inability to trust.

Phyllida had come away from that first meeting after Philip's crash not altogether disheartened, for all that she could see that the old mistrust was still present. The changes that responsibility, that freedom from financial anxiety, that a forced physical activity, had wrought in him held the promise of much happiness, as well for her as for him; and to Phyllida, the future looked brighter than it had looked since the first hopes that she had brought, in ignorance of his character, to her marriage had faded.

All the same, the residuary secretiveness on his part had still had the power to leave the question unanswered—unasked: when Philip left the hospital—discharged—would he be discharged as 'fit for duty'?

'Tactful' inquiry of the ward-sister, on Phyllida's way out, had failed to get an answer to that question.

Phyllida, staring at that *Squadron-Leader Philip Armitage Hammond*, remembered the decision that she had taken as she had walked out of the hospital entrance, and got into the waiting hire-car.

Philip would not go back. No, not though a battalion of medical boards passed him as fit for duty; not though he himself should wish to risk his life again; risk more than his

life; risk that terror of the hidden half-existence at which he had hinted so fearfully in his letters. . . . He had had enough, whether or not he knew it.

He had become something that Phyllida—at last—could find it in her to respect, as well as love. (*But the funny thing is, she had marvelled, that I don't love him the least little bit less!*)

Phyllida had not joined one of the Women's Services, but had joined the Drivers' Pool, so as to make sure that she should have as many chances as possible of seeing Philip between his short leaves and even between sorties.

She was a competent driver, with the then greatly valued (because so valuable) advantage of being able to see extraordinarily well at night. Cats'-eyes in a world of shadows were as useful as they were rare.

The uniform, too, became her. This she wore, not only with elegance, but with *panache*; and so there was nothing astonishing in the fact that she should come soon—she competent above the ordinary, as well as elegant above the ordinary—to be driving a Great Man from one bomb-proof cavern to another.

I've never asked him a single favour yet, Phyllida remembered thinking, *except to ask for special leave now and then. But he's going to get Philip grounded if it's the last favour he ever does.*

Phyllida got on well with her Boss; mostly because the envy which, during the years of war, was the strongest disturber of harmony in human relationships had never had much to feed upon.

Had Philip been in the Army, Phyllida might well have resented the fact that the war seemed to have brought no material hardships to her Boss; that he could eat and smoke and clothe himself as well now as ever he had been able in the days before 1939.

But men in the Air Force, like men in the Navy—and both very unlike men in the Army—went most comfortably into danger. So long as they were still alive, they did not know what it was to suffer from the smaller deprivations. Philip could have as many cigars as he wished, and could drive about in a car quite as often and as far (when he wished it) as the Boss. Philip never went short of clothes or drink or all the other things which make the difference between comfort and discomfort in life. There was no need to be jealous of anything that her Boss enjoyed save his comparative immunity from

physical danger—and Phyllida, 'getting a move on' as she sped from one bolt-hole to the next, found herself wondering whether or not her Boss purchased his physical safety at too great a price; whether or not his nervous system would not have been the healthier had he risked more danger and avoided less. In any case, his patent desire to get underground as much as possible, and as quickly as possible, was not a sentiment that Phyllida would wish that Philip enjoyed. She had, then, no envy of her Boss's comfortable life, rendered uneasy by a constant apprehension of physical calamity; and since she had no need to envy him, she got on as well with him as she could have hoped.

The Boss, of course, was jealous of Philip. Or to be quite accurate, of Philip's ability to earn the D.S.O. and the D.F.C.

The Boss envied Philip nothing else—not even Philip's wife; for the Boss, who had risen to high position from a humble role in a spinning-mill, had got himself an elegant mistress, as smooth and as black and as shiny and as hard as a beetle, whose avarice and ingratitude for even the greatest favours had convinced the gentleman that he had formed a liaison with what he called Class. He had never even brushed Phyllida's hand in alighting from the Rolls-Royce that the Government compensated him for using in its service.

Indeed, had this person had the power so to alter the statutes of the Distinguished Service Order that it might be awarded to those who saw to it that others did the actual fighting, he would have envied Philip nothing. Nothing at all. And, as it was, so many others had the distinctions that he envied because they were *completely* beyond his reach, that his jealousy of Philip was a mild, a trivial emotion: not powerful enough to cause him to fight against doing Philip a favour, and yet sufficiently strong that the Boss had to show himself sympathetic to Philip in order to prove that he had no envy of the man for whom favours were being asked.

Besides, he was not so used to All-Power that petitioners for his favours had come to bore him; he still felt pleasure—even excitement—when someone less successful than he called attention to his success—admitted his superiority—in asking his help.

'You feel he's had—I mean: he's *done*—enough?'

'I feel both: that he's done enough—and had enough. I think he's done as much as anyone could have been expected to do. But . . . the point is: will *he* ever agree to that?'

'Ah . . . See what you mean! Over-conscientious type, eh? They can do themselves a lot of harm. And'—already providing himself with the 'reasons' that he would give for his interference in the affairs of the Air Force—'he's probably not as recovered as he thinks. Deceiving himself, most likely, when he tells them he feels all right. Actually, far from being the best thing to go back and do another turn of duty, it would be a rather dangerous thing . . . for all concerned. Eh? Might crack up at a critical moment. Eh? Don't you agree? Eh?'

Phyllida said yes or no, at the proper times; and let the Boss go on persuading himself, first, that *he* had decided that Philip had done enough to justify a reputation for patriotism and social duty, and, second, that it would be the best thing for the country that Philip should be forbidden to fly again.

'Oh, well . . . you just leave everything to me. As a matter of fact, it'd be a sin and a shame to risk your husband's life when they can't possibly know whether there's any hidden weakness that may show up later—when one's least expecting it. Besides, there's other people's lives to consider, as well as the 'plane. 'Wouldn't be fair. Not fair at all. Okay, Mrs. Hammond, I reckon it's my duty to see that your husband's talents are used in some other sphere of duty. . . .'

It had been as easy as that, Phyllida thought, staring at the tablet, and only half-hearing what the Rector was saying to Judkins, and Judkins was saying to the Rector, about the older of the memorial tablets in Hasling Church. They had, it seemed, forgotten for the moment what had brought them to Judkins's shed; and so, for the moment, had Phyllida.

She had concealed from Philip the active part that she had taken in getting him grounded. She had concealed that—just (she told herself) as he had so often concealed things from her. *And if he says he did it for my own good, well, then . . . I can say the same. But it's true, when I say it. . . .*

Nothing should have been done 'officially' until the time for his discharge had come; when there would be need to settle the conditions of his future employment. But—somehow—there had been a premature release of news; a 'leak'; and Philip had learnt—'on good authority'—that he was to be up-graded to Wing-Commander and put in command of one of the training-schools; possibly sent back to Canada.

Phyllida had gone down to the hospital one day—there had been another operation since her previous visit—to find Philip very angry. At the time, she had felt, she remembered, a

faint mistrust of the anger's genuineness; she wondered whether or not this anger were not just a little *forced*, perhaps? She found herself thinking that Philip might have been angry rather for reasons of the mind than of the heart—because he felt that it was the thing to do to be angry. She wondered whether or not, in truth, he were not, perhaps, rather relieved than hurt that the decision to fly or not to fly was to be taken out of his hands.

Now, looking back, Phyllida knew that the anger had been real enough; that the element of insincerity that she had thought that she had sensed in the anger had been due to the fact that Philip had been pretending to be angry about one thing when, in truth, it was something quite different which had angered him. It hadn't been the prospect of being appointed to a training-school which had made him angry, it was only the prospect of being appointed to a training-school in Canada. . . . Sent back to Canada. . . .

Well . . . it must have been that, Phyllida thought, remembering the letter in her handbag. The one which had arrived that morning. The one from Mrs. Hunter-Greer. Anne . . .

Phyllida shook herself . . . mentally. She didn't wish to think of Mrs. Hunter-Greer, and recall the look that Philip's face had worn when he had said:

'But, God dammit, Phyll, they can't do this to me! I wish to heavens I had some *real* influence. I wish I knew some really *high* High-Ups! I'd soon get myself airborne again. What about this chap of yours? Isn't he important? I bet he could pull a few strings, if he wanted to. . . .'

Phyllida had said:

'I imagine he could pull any string he liked . . . if he wanted to . . .'

Dismally:

'Like that, eh?'

'Just like that. To listen to him, you'd think he'd started work in that mill at the time that they let infants-in-arms mind the spindles, or join the threads, or whatever it is that they do in mills. In the short time I've been with him as his driver, he's gone steadily back. He told me at first that he'd gone out to work at thirteen. I suppose I didn't look sufficiently impressed—or horrified, perhaps—and so it's got down to eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven. It was six last week: eighteen hours a day, picking blackberries, at a penny a hundredweight.

I don't think it'd be any good asking him to help a man who didn't start work until he was past twenty, do you?"

It was odd, but Phyllida hadn't felt the least bit treacherous to her employer in thus wronging him. For what else could she have done? Had Philip pursued *that* idea to the point of trying to gain the Boss's influence on Philip's behalf, well . . . Philip might have started some trouble.

But he hadn't pursued it. He had accepted Phyllida's calm dismissal of his suggestion that the Boss might be able to help; and, as for the transfer to the Canadian training-school, well . . . as it turned out . . . as it turned out . . .

The bitterness welled up like bile; burning, choking, nauseating—yet with something sweet in the bitterness. The bitter-sweet of bile. . . .

She had been able to see more and more of Philip. He had nerved himself to let her see him, as he was, with his face satiny shiny-red with unhealed scar-tissue. And, having been satisfied—apparently—with her response to his new physical condition, he had no more protest to offer against her visiting him whenever she could get away from her duties in London.

So that she watched the gradual smoothing out of the scars that the first bold reconstructural surgery had left. Gusher—now back with his squadron—came over to the hospital in his brilliant blue M.G. Midget, with the picture of Mae West painted on the bonnet, and his rough, childish enthusiasm did much to lighten an atmosphere which sometimes threatened to grow heavy with too much hope.

'Yeah, Mrs. Hammond, the old man's still a bit lobstery. But, did you take a gander at *my* dial? See all this lovely white skin? Yeah . . . Well, half of it's from my ass, and half of it's from some other poor guy. You wanna wait a bit, and you'll never reckonize Phil—he'll be that beautiful. You see. . . .'

But she *was* seeing. It was something more than merely wonderful; it seemed—literally—miraculous. And when, towards the end of the long period of surgical care, Philip dared to show her a photograph of the face that he had seen immediately after the first bandages had been removed, she was stirred, not to horror or disgust or fear, but to a trembling gratitude for the skill of the surgeons, and a dizzy wonder that it lay in the power of mere human beings to work such prodigies of skill.

Philip's hair grew—thicker, it seemed, than it had been. (*But that's because I don't have the worry*, he had said, not altogether jokingly.)

And the scars dwindled to fine, thread-like white lines, against a skin only a shade less white. The one deep scar which was left ran diagonally across his cheek, like a duelling-scar. (*It makes you look rather romantic, Philip . . . I like it. . .*)

Soon, as Phyllida could see—and was rather touched to know it—Philip came to like it too. Perhaps, she thought, *he* thinks it's romantic, too.

She used sometimes to wonder if Gusher were as stupid as he sounded. He didn't *look* stupid, although one would never have taken him for the intellectual type. But Gusher did look as though he might have seen that the healing, the reconstruction, the rehabilitation were something more than surface-deep.

On that day which had been the first on which she had been permitted to visit him, Philip's face had had a curious—a ghastly—mask-like smoothness and rigidity. It was smooth in spite of the scars; it was fixed, varnished, stuck, in spite of the nervous twitching which sometimes caught the mouth up in a terrible rictus which was like a maniac sneer. There was no *life* in the face, only unthinking *movement*; and, as she came to find courage to recall that mask, Phyllida remembered that the face—travesty of the lively, intelligently animated face that she had once known—was not more dead than the eyes which had peered out, hostile yet uncaring, from between the scarlet, puffy lids.

Oh, Phyllida had looked at him all right. Of course. But . . . she hadn't cared for it. There had been a tight something-or-other; an immovable heaviness in her diaphragm; reminding her of nothing so much as an indigestible home-made bun that no bicarbonate of soda would shift. . . .

Something better had shifted it, though. Just watching the scars on the soul heal, even as the scars on the face were being healed. With delicate, loving fingers, the surgeons were stitching up the wounds, ironing out the gathers and tucks that the first operations had left; whitening the skin; taking that horrible red shine from the too-smooth flesh. And, all the time, their scalpels and needles were healing the Philip-within; healing that which had peered out of eyes which had once belonged to Philip Hammond as he was, and as he would be again, God willing!

The wonder of the healing strengthened her resolve to keep him safe. She read the papers now, not to see what were the prospects for civilization's triumph, but what were the prospects for Philip Hammond's survival.

He began to grow impatient—as men long confined to hospital do—to cut short his convalescence; but she had not the least hesitation in nagging, when 'rational' argument seemed to be failing; or in turning to tears, when even nagging appeared to be losing the trick.

She made plans. All the time she was making plans. Plans for both of them; plans to prevent his ever being lost to her again. . . .

And then, there was the afternoon when she got off the train, and saw Gusher walking along the platform towards her.

'Why, Gusher,' she had said, smiling, 'this is a pleasant surprise! Are you coming over to see Philip with me?'

Gusher had touched the peak of his uniform-cap in a brief salute-among-friends.

And even before he had said, 'Not just yet, Phyllida: I want to talk to you,' she had known.

The curious thing was that—as she remembered—all that she could think of was that her Uncle Jack had been killed by a stray bullet at a few minutes after eleven o'clock on November 11th, 1918.

Some fool clearing his rifle. . . .

She said, with a catch in her voice:

'Mr. Cartwright: do *you* think the wording will give offence?'

The Rector looked surprised—almost startled.

'Give offence, Mrs. Hammond?'

Phyllida looked hard at Judkins, who unconcernedly took out his pipe as he returned her look.

'Yes. Give offence. To those people who find it uncomfortable to be reminded of anything nasty. . . .'

The Rector frowned.

'Has anyone protested *already*, Mrs. Hammond?'

He emphasized the adverb, as though he was prepared to admit that there would be some opposition. Phyllida jerked her head briefly in the direction of Judkins.

'Right from the start, eh, Judkins? *Judkins* thought it was . . . Did you think it was bad taste, Judkins? Tell us: we're interested, Mr. Cartwright and I.'

The defiant bitterness in her voice could not stir Judkins to any response harsher than a rather lip-thinning smile. He took his pipe out of his mouth, scratched the back of his deeply furrowed neck, and said gently:

'I only thought, Miss, as stone's kind of *permanent-like*, you might have cared to think over the lettering a bit. Cutting a inscription ain't like writing a letter. You c'n tear up a letter, Miss, and write another. Or perhaps, next morning, not write one at all. That's all, Miss; that's all I sugged: that you might like to think it over. . . .'

There was a look in his old, shrewd eyes which said, as plainly as though he had spoken: *And just leave the matter there, Miss. I shouldn't say no more, ef I was you. . . .*

But she was remembering Gusher, as he had stood before her, and with awkward gentleness, had taken the crook of her arm in his huge, hard hand, as he had turned her gently away from the station-exit, and had led her along the platform to the bridge which took them to the up-platform. . . .

Gusher . . . The last time that she saw him. The last time that she was ever to see him. . . .

She said angrily—almost spitefully:

'I thought you said that Mr. Cartwright would have to give his permission. . . .?'

'That's right, Miss,' said Judkins, with the lightest of sighs.

'Hinting that *he* might think it was awful, even if *I* couldn't be made to see it. . . .'

Judkins nodded, a smile playing around his mouth, but not around his eyes.

'Seems, Miss, as though Rector approves, just the same. . . .'

'Of course I approve, Judkins,' said Mr. Cartwright, sharply. 'And why not, pray?'

'That's for you to say, Rector. If you approve, seems there's an end of it, like. . . .'

'Why!' said the Rector. 'Don't *you* approve, Judkins? Do you condone deliberate murder? I'm glad to say that *I* don't!'

Judkins said, obstinately:

'They dug a Roman altar up at Fort Ripeham t'other day. I don't know all what was writ on it; but it was nothing which made much sense to us folk today. Gods of the Underworld. Don't mean a thing,' said Judkins, staring at his blackened pipe. 'Not a thing. Yet them letters was cut as clear as I cut letters now.'

'Ay, Mr. Cartwright, an' they've lasted longer than people

have taken to forget all their odd notions. That's all,' he said, putting his pipe back in his pocket; 'and if the young lady says it's all right, and if you, Rector, say it's all right, well . . . well, I guess it must *be* all right, eh?'

'I don't want to forget,' said Phyllida, with a sort of smouldering passion. 'I don't want to forget, because it's so easy to forget. Because we're lazy, and having a heart takes some effort. I want what I once thought cut in stone, so that I'll never be able to forget. So that, when I *do* forget—if I do forget—if I ever *let* myself forget—the stone will reproach me. That's what I want, Judkins . . . and I'm glad you've cut the letters deep.'

Judkins moved over to the door. He touched his old hat. He said gently:

'Ay, Miss, they're deep enough. They'll last all right. . . .'

In breaking off his theological studies, in order to join up, Alan Cartwright had not only interrupted his studies, he had lost his vocation. After seven years of military service, during which time he had risen from private to full colonel, and seen active service on a dozen battle-fronts, he had returned to the theological college to find himself in the company of fellow-students who resented his not having taken advantage of the fact that a theological student's was a 'reserved occupation' as much as Cartwright despised them for having seen their vocation as an excuse to avoid behaving as men.

On the other hand, if Alan Cartwright had lost his vocation—and was aware of it—he had not lost his faith, which had been strengthened, rather than weakened, by his military service.

And, because his faith was stronger now than it had been in the days before the war, he could not look upon his having lost his vocation save as something chargeable to a moral deficiency in himself. His conscience troubled him; and it was his constant preoccupation to prove himself worthy of the priesthood, so that he might be forgiven for having lost his burning zeal to serve God as a priest.

Mr. Cartwright did not call himself 'Father Cartwright', nor did he call the Communion Service, 'Mass'. Nor did one smell incense in his church, or come across tinselled pictures of most un-Anglican taste. Mr. Cartwright, in short, had no leanings to Rome, and had no alterations to suggest in the

Book of Common Prayer. It follows, then, that he did not accept the Pope's claim to infallibility.

Yet it was only because the Pope was the head of a different branch of the One, Catholic and Apostolic Church that Mr. Cartwright rejected His Holiness's claims to infallibility. For it was rather the Pope than his infallibility that Mr. Cartwright rejected.

Mr. Cartwright, in fact, was a firm believer in infallibility; and his simple faith embraced that dangerous belief that a man who firmly believes in Almighty God may do no wrong. Rather, he will not be allowed to do wrong. Mr. Cartwright would have resented one's suggesting that he thought himself infallible; but that, in truth, was just what he did think.

He believed in God. Therefore—and it *was* therefore—Mr. Cartwright could do no wrong. God would not have allowed error to have guided the actions of the man who believed so implicitly in Him. . . .

Hasling knew this, of course. There was nothing secret about Mr. Cartwright's infallibility, or perhaps it would be better to say, his unshaken faith in his inability to be otherwise than right on all subjects involving the moral laws. (And that meant, so far as the Rector was concerned, everything. Everything. . . .)

Hasling didn't dislike its Rector. The commonest phrase used in describing him (though not to his face) was, *that young parson of ourn who's going to be Archbishop of Canterbury*. And if this was said half-facetiously, there was an underlying seriousness in the remark which was apparent to the speaker as well as to the listener. Hasling was not going to be astonished when its Rector was eventually raised to the Primacy of All England.

There were others, more freely spoken—and necessarily briefer—who used sometimes to refer to Alan Cartwright as a Bossy Bastard.

These used often to add that it was a pity Rector ever left the Army; that it was their opinion that he must have been in his element there, speaking with no one able to answer back; and with a bunch of sergeants ready to see his orders was obeyed. Oh, yus, he musta liked that all right. . . . !

And there can be no doubt that there were times when, even in reading the Lesson, the Rector seemed to be addressing a battalion, rather than a congregation. He snapped orders at the choir-boys, at the choristers, at the sidesmen, at even the devout old ladies who are the mainstay of any church and of any Church.

The Rector was unaware that his acquired peremptoriness sometimes—often, indeed—passed well beyond the bounds prescribed by ecclesiastical convention. The days when it was fashionable for John Knox to be John Knox were, as the other Colonel—Colonel Somers, of Hasling Old Hall—pointed out, gone. But if that were true, the Rector had not heard of it.

Yet Hasling bore with their Rector because of that quality of *certainly* which was his most notable characteristic. In a world of shifting foundations, of wobbling ideals, and of values which were as insubstantial and evanescent as a morning mist, the Rector seemed to offer, in his certainty, that moral security without which no perfect assurance in the stability of physical and material values is possible. To the Rector, the picture of the Universe was drawn in clear black and white; there were, for him, no half-tones. Right was right and wrong was wrong; and the Rector never doubted his ability to distinguish one from the other.

Nor—though he could sympathize with others' imperfect perception—did he hesitate to point out error when he encountered it. No respect for conventional 'politeness'; for conventional 'good manners', for conventional 'tact'—and certainly not for any self-advancement—restrained the Rector from denouncing even venial faults. 'Christ was perfect,' he once snapped, at Evensong; 'and we can't be perfect. (Lot of nonsense to think we can!) But God won't accept any excuses from us for not having been as good as *we could have been*. Don't you forget that!'

If his congregation were in any danger of forgetting it, there was always the Rector to remind them. Indeed, the only person in Hasling who did not find the Rector's brand of religion more or less uncomfortable was the Rector; but, as Colonel Somers—the Rector's only really vocal critic—said, a hair-shirt must drive you mad only during the first few years.

The Rector's favourite quotation was from Chesterton, a theological authority, whom—if one were to judge by the frequency with which Mr. Cartwright quoted him—the Rector preferred to any of the compilers of Holy Writ. 'Chesterton,' the Rector was glad to remind his congregation, 'angrily rejected the idea that Christianity, as so many people have said unthinkingly, has been tried and found wanting. Chesterton pointed out the truth when he said that, far from that, Christianity has been found difficult, and has not been tried.'

Hasling understood that Christianity was as difficult as others had found it, but that Hasling was not going to be let off the duty of trying it.

Yet even Colonel Somers, who did not like the Rector, said, 'When I say I don't like the chap, for God's sake don't misunderstand me, and think I said I didn't respect him. I do. He knows what he wants. He thinks like a gentleman.'

No doubt Phyllida had something of the sort in mind when she said, with an apparent artlessness which was intended to—and did, indeed—'draw' the Rector:

'Right from the beginning, Judkins disliked the idea of my wording. But, actually, it wasn't against *you* so much, Mr. Cartwright, that he warned me, as against the Bishop. . . .'

They had begun to move out of the shed, and had already come to the door; but now the Rector stopped and turned full towards Phyllida. His face showed considerable astonishment.

'Warned you, Mrs. Hammond? Against . . . I'm afraid that I don't quite understand?'

Phyllida was conscious of a quickening of her pulses. For one moment she felt that she had embarked upon a game too dangerous to be played; and for one moment she knew a panic urge to draw back. But a bitter obstinacy was present to strengthen her; and all the childish wilfulness in her nature pleaded to be allowed to have its own way at all costs. The childish wilfulness won. . . .

She said quietly:

'I mean about the inscription. . . .'

'What about it? I think it's excellent. Judkins,' the Rector added, with a sort of mild contemptuousness, 'gets a bit too big for his boots sometimes. He's hardly in a position to set up as a literary critic, much as he knows about the stone-mason's trade.'

'No, Mr. Cartwright. Not that. He pretended, as a matter of fact, that the inscription . . . well, that he didn't care one way or the other what he was asked to carve.'

'No more he should! It's no business of his.'

'I know. But he pretended some reluctance to set about doing it, in case it might not be allowed, and I should lose my money.'

'Not *allowed*? By *whom*, for goodness' sake?'

Phyllida's voice was mouse-like as she said:

'By . . . by you, Mr. Cartwright . . .' And before he could explode into an angry question, she added hastily: 'I mean: don't you have to give permission for any tablet or . . . or tombstone . . . to be put up?'

'Oh . . . I see. Well, yes, of course I do.' Frowning, as though puzzled: 'But . . . well, only to see there's nothing . . . um . . . well . . . childish, stupid . . . ridiculous. You know the sort of thing. If I remember, there's even an anthology of odd inscriptions, published not so long ago. That sort of thing couldn't be allowed to go on. It was getting too much of a joke.' His face lightened as he added: 'One I remember: *Chewing-gum is sweet, chewing-gum is poison; chewing-gum has brought me here.* (Not that that applies, of course, to modern chewing-gum: otherwise there'd be no Americans, eh?) But'—serious again—'facetious or sickly sentimental inscriptions are out of place in churches and cemeteries. Why should Judkins, though, have thought I'd object to *yours*, Mrs. Hammond?'

Phyllida knew that it was her clothes which were bringing out all which was most feminine in her; but, for all that, she could not help saying:

'Oh, I don't think he thought *you* would object so much. As he said, you *were* in the Army. . . .'

'Well, so I was. What's that got to do with it?'

'No. That's what Judkins said: that, because you'd been in the Army, you'd think it was all right. My inscription, I mean.'

'Why shouldn't I think it was all right—even if I hadn't been in the Army?'

'Judkins thought that anyone who hadn't been in the Army might have found it too . . . too bitter. At least, that's what I gathered.'

'Oh . . .'

'And that was why Judkins suggested that, even if I got *your* permission (and he didn't seem to think I'd have much trouble there) I'd never get the Bishop to agree to let me put the stone up. Was he right?'

Now the Recording Angel will have to report that the Rector said, *What the deuce has the Bishop got to do with it?*

But only the Recording Angel knows that, since the Rector, with uncustomary tact, did not say it aloud, though his expression made it clear what he was thinking. At last he said gruffly:

'I don't think you need worry about getting His Lordship's permission, Mrs. Hammond. I'll attend to that side of it. In any case,' the Rector added, with an assurance that he was very far from feeling, 'the Bishop's permission is a mere formality.

'There'll be no trouble about getting *that*. . . '

'I'm so glad,' said Phyllida demurely. 'Do *you* think it's too bitter, Mr. Cartwright?'

'Not a bit, Mrs. Hammond,' said the Rector, stoutly. 'There's too much of this namby-pamby forgive-and-forget business in the world. We are enjoined by Almighty God to forgive. Nowhere in Holy Writ do I find any injunction upon us to forget. And when people say forgive-and-forget, they don't really mean that at all. They mean forget-because-it-saves-trouble. Murder's murder; and sin's sin. The mere passage of years doesn't alter the nature of crime. Mrs. Hammond,' he said, with a sudden passionate energy, 'I'll put that tablet up in my church, and—by Heaven! madam—I'll *keep it there!*'

'Thank you,' said Phyllida. 'That's what I wanted. . . '

They said good-bye outside the post office.

'I've got to ring up London,' said Phyllida.

For she had suddenly become aware of the reason for her having changed her clothes.

The critic was still in his office, and Phyllida, glancing at the old, bald-faced clock on the wall, saw that she was in good time to catch the 11.10 up-train, with time to spare for a coffee at 'Pam's Kitchen'.

'Would you be very offended,' Phyllida said, 'if your collaborator—though a woman—were to ask you to luncheon?'

The critic was not over-burdened with masculinity, but he made as much fuss in accepting as convention demands of the undoubted male. However, he permitted his objections to be overruled a little more easily than might have been the case had he been a little more masculine; and he agreed to meet Phyllida in the lounge of the Berkeley Buttery at one o'clock.

'I don't see why I should sting you for a "Maison Gasconne" lunch,' he said, to point out that he had achieved success of the sort which could take the 'Maison Gasconne' in its stride.

'Meet me at the "Maison Gasconne". One o'clock,' said Phyllida. And rang off, feeling—she hardly knew why—like shouting with a sort of hysterical joyousness.

The wives-out-shopping—and Pam's ladylike coffee—were just what Phyllida needed to calm her down.

By the time that the train came hissing out of the tunnel, she was already regretting her impulse to go to London.

Curiously, it was the critic who restored Phyllida's lightness of heart.

Though she could not hear the strokes of the bell above the noise of the Piccadilly traffic, Big Ben was striking one o'clock as Phyllida came through the door of the 'Maison Gasconne', and found the critic sitting in the small lounge, reading the midday *Standard*.

'My, my!' he said, holding her hand as he stood well away from her, to run practised eyes up and down her elegant suit. 'How positively *ravishing* you look! And all for *me*? Surely not. . . ?'

The flattery was so crude that it caught the attention, held the interest, aroused pleasure, where flattery in a subtler guise would have passed unnoticed and unwarming.

Half ashamed of herself for letting the flattery so please her, Phyllida shook off the depression which had been gathering about her since she had ordered coffee at 'Pam's Kitchen', and seen the eyebrows rise as the coffee-drinkers had noticed her new suit and the little green hat. *Their* noticing her clothes hadn't warmed her, made her feel young and attractive and happy. . . .

'Come,' said Phyllida, giving the critic's hand a gently dismissive squeeze, 'you'd better keep your compliments for your important friends.' She sat down in the chair that the waiter had pulled out. 'Shall we have a drink before going in to luncheon? I'm afraid I quite forgot to order a table.'

'Ah-ha, I thought you might have forgotten *that*! So I 'phoned up instead. There's a table ordered; and now . . . what? An *apéritif*, perhaps? What do you like?'

'You suggest something . . .'

'Really. . . ? Do you really mean that?'

Smiling:

'Why, of course I do. I can't think of anything like that this morning. You order, please.'

'Very well then. Waiter: we'll have some gin-and-Dubonnet. Make them large ones, Waiter. . . .'

'Large gin-and-Dubonnet, sir. For two. Certainly, sir.'

'Lemon-peel. But *no* ice. Well . . . not for me. Do you like ice, Mrs. Hammond?' the critic added, with very much the air of an afterthought.

Smiling, she shook her head.

'No.'

'No ice, then, Waiter. And—yes—some of those little crackly tube-things. You know. I don't know what on *earth* they're called! But I expect you do, Waiter. . . ?'

'Yes, sir. I know what you mean.'

As the waiter shuffled off, the critic leaned forward and said,

'How I'm *longing* for a drink! I've been working like a *beaver*, ever since about half-past six. I'm *literally* exhausted. Well,' with a gay, brave little smile, 'suppose we don't talk about *my* troubles, and ask what *you've* been doing? Eh? And what *have* you been doing? Something madly exciting, I'll bet!'

'Hasling's not that exciting,' said Phyllida, wondering why on earth this shallow nonsense should please. (But it did, all the same.) 'There's never very much to do, you know, in the country. . . .'

'Oh,' said the critic, shrilly, 'I'd find a whole *heap* of things to do. I *love* finding things to do. And that reminds me: did you get the proofs all right?'

Phyllida tapped her bag with a forefinger.

'Here. I wanted to ask you something. . . .'

'Yes. Yes, we will. But later. Ah! here come the drinks, for thirsty little Us!'

The waiter put the drinks on the table; nor had he forgotten the little crackly tube-things. The critic picked one up, and popped it greedily into his rather small mouth. The waiter bowed and left.

'Well,' said the critic, 'here's astonishing luck! Chin-chin! What fun it is eating out! I love cooking in my little flat (it's just a wee bijou *pied-à-terre*, of course: but quite *fun*, if you know what I mean). But I must admit that I do love not having all that getting-ready and—worse—all that washing-up to do.

'By the way, *have* you tried *Twisk*? It's *madly* expensive, of course, but—oh, my *dear*!—how it washes up! Just like the ads. say it does. (I never believe a word they *say*, on principle—but that just shows you!) You mean to say you don't know *Twisk*? You must get a packet at *once*!'

'Do you . . . Are you connected with it in any way?'

'With *Twisk*? Do I make it, you mean? Good *heavens* no! I'm absolutely unbribed, my dear, to recommend *Twisk*, the Housewives' Joy, to attractive young women in expensive restaurants. (I only wish Messrs. Twisk Ltd., or whoever they

are, *would* pay me! As it is, I do it for love. Only it *is* so marvellous.)’

Phyllida said, ‘I must try some. Oh . . . by the way: these proofs. . . .’

‘Galleys, they’re called.’

‘Oh . . . are they? Oh, yes, of course. Tell me: are they . . . I mean: do they complete the book? What I’m trying to ask is: is the whole book here?’

‘Unless we find something new to add. (Would you like another gin-and-Dubonnet? I think we’d better, don’t you? *Waiter!*)

‘Of course, the trouble is, you can go on adding and adding and adding. I know that from when I was once in a publisher’s office. The trouble we had with a man who was writing the life of someone-or-other (I forget now who). We could never get the MS. out of him. He would go to the B.M. every mortal day, and keep finding something fresh about his hero—whoever he was.

‘Oh, thank you, Waiter! Well . . . here’s astonishing luck! Chin-chin! Yes . . . now. Ah! Yes. . . .

‘Well, at any rate he would never have got it finished. So I was sent down to get it. I had the most fearful job getting it. Couldn’t I leave it over just a week? Just three days then?’

‘Not a day, I said. And meant it. But even then our troubles weren’t over. He gave us the MS., and—the crafty brute!—went on collecting more material for his precious book. Consequence: he wanted to shove about an additional ninety thousand words into the galleys. (As it was, he managed to add another twenty thousand, without the word of a lie.) And we had the same trouble when the page-proofs came along.

‘No’—sipping delicately at his drink—‘you have to draw the line somewhere. There comes a time when you’ve got to tell yourself, very firmly *indeed*: Now, come along! Finish this up! Next to knowing how to begin is knowing how to end. It calls for a lot of decision sometimes, but it’s got to be done. It’s just like closing the doors for a performance. People either make sure they get in on time, or they jolly well stay out.’

Suddenly Phyllida realized why the critic, in spite of some manifest disadvantages, had got on. He had an iron will, and he was as willing to apply it to himself as to others. She did not like him any better with the realization, but she respected him more. Further, some doubts that she had had regarding

his general business capacity vanished. She began, not only to trust him, but to feel content that he should have the direction of their joint enterprise. She said:

'And you've decided not to admit any new material? I'm sure you know best.'

He said, rather petulantly:

'Oh, it's not easy to make decisions, I can assure you. But it is easier, in the long run, to stick to decisions—*no matter*—than to let them worry you, and then not to take them. I've made up my mind, and I'm sticking to my decision. I've finished the book, and it would have to be something *jolly* important to get let in at *this* late hour. (Though, mark you, we could always find room for something if it *were* important.) Well, I mean . . . Just to show you . . .' He reached over, and picked up a brief-case which was lying, with his hat and gloves, on a nearby chair. He opened the bag, with thin, white, useless-looking, highly competent fingers, and riffled around within it. He pulled out a magazine, whose limp covers and slightly nicked edges showed it to be some years old. The critic held up the magazine, front cover forward, and Phyllida read the name, *Good Breeding*.

'Out of business before the war,' said the critic, bending over the magazine, as he turned the pages. 'There's something . . . yes . . . Ah, here we are!' He reversed the magazine, and held it open, presenting it to her, that she might read what he was marking with an index-finger. 'It's *maddening*, but I came across this only yesterday. Just one of those things. But it just happened. In *fact*'—Phyllida took the magazine, and looked at the part indicated by the pointing finger—'I had actually *passed* the page, when something about the *initials* struck me. P. A. H. Philip Armitage Hammond. Did *you* know he'd ever written for *Good Breeding*? Of course . . . Well, you read it . . . unless you *have* read it?'

'No, I haven't ever seen it. But . . . I suppose "P. A. H." is Philip? It *could* be someone else. . . .'

'Certainly not, dear lady,' said the critic, with that air of competence—of faultless, unsleeping competence—that Phyllida used sometimes to find so unsympathetic. 'Naturally, I went 'round to see the Editress. Well, I mean: the woman who *used* to edit *Good Breeding*. Now she edits *Noblewoman*. Jane Beardsley-Grant. A frightful hag. But madly competent in ruining magazine after magazine, without ruining herself. A simply *wonderful* type!

'Oh, it's Philip all right. But do read it, if you haven't already, It's so *vraiment typique*. I do wish I weren't so *madly* strong-willed. I'd have *loved* to have got that one in. . . .'

Phyllida tried to close her ears to the chatter that, she now knew, only death would halt. She concentrated on the page of print, and managed to read, through and above and below all the chatter:

THE SESQUIPEDALIAN CAT

I once had a Sesquipedalian Cat;
A cat with a foot-and-a-half;
A paw-and-a-half on the same little leg;
A freak that made other cats laugh.

Now the din that the Sesquipedalian Cat
Kicked up as she walked on the parquet,
Was often as loud as the tread of a squad,
Marching along in their khaki.

But the Sesquipedalian Cat, I avow,
Had advantages other cats lack:
Though her eyes were no greener, her velvety coat
Was fifty per cent blacker black.

Yet her mew was as soft as her tread was loud;
No cry-and-a-half uttered she.
Her voice, indeed, seemed but the shadowy wraith
Of what a cat's voice should be.

So . . .
. . . give me each time
(And I say it in rhyme!)
A puss-cat that's Sesquipedalian;
With no more than a sigh
For its average cry,
You should care that its paw's a bit alien!

For close-fitting carpets will deaden the noise
Of the feet of Sesquipedal Cats:
That's all that you need to perfect them as pets,
Ideal for the dwellers in flats.

I once had a Sesquipedalian Cat;
A cat with a heart-and-a-half;
To sustain her respect, and strengthen her pride,
When she heard all the other cats laugh.

'Yes . . . ' said Phyllida. (Cats again!) 'Why "sesquipedalian"? I thought it meant using long words.'

'It's Latin for a foot-and-a-half. Or really, something which is half as long again. So he's made a pun on the cat's foot. Have you ever seen a cat with that sort of foot? I have. Once. Most odd. Rather frightening, really . . .'

'Do you suppose Miss Whatever-her-name-was—the Editress . . .'

'Jane Beardsley-Grant?'

'Yes. Do you suppose she knew what "sesquipedalian" meant?'

'Only after she'd looked it up in the dictionary . . . as I did.'

The critic tittered, and helped himself to some of those little crackly tube-things.

'I see. Well . . . don't tell me her readers knew what "sesquipedalian" meant? They must have thought it meant "Siamese"—only different.'

'Oh,' said the critic airily, signing to the waiter to bring more drink, 'she wouldn't mind about *that*. In fact, she'd prefer it, if her readers were a bit baffled.'

'I don't see that that'd be the way to increase your circulation.'

'Well, of course not. All Jane's papers fold up. But no one can say a *word* to Jane. My God, you should see her flare up at the slightest criticism! Still . . . it is rather a pity I can't put this poem in. (Oh, thank you, Waiter!) But then . . . (Here's simply astonishing luck!) . . . but then, I'd have to let *everything* in. And that I simply *will not* do. No . . . *c'est* . . . well not *fini* so much as *complet*. I know what I'll do,' said the critic, carefully taking the magazine out of Phyllida's hand, and closing it before putting it back into his brief-case; 'I'll just do a second volume. Still . . . there it is: as I said. Make a rule, and stick to it.'

Phyllida said, in a quiet voice:

'Is that why you gave Mrs. Hunter-Greer the cold shoulder?'

The critic's eyebrows went up.

'Oh-ho! And how, may I ask, do you know that I did?'

He looked unutterably cunning; but Phyllida did not doubt that he was—or could be, if he so chose—ten times more cunning even than he could look. She said, with an air of transparent simplicity:

'She wrote and told me so. I got the letter this morning. That was one of the things I wanted to see you about.'

'What did she say?'

'You can read her letter if you like. I've got it here,' said Phyllida, opening her handbag.

'Oh . . . may I?' Taking it: 'What awful handwriting! Do you know her, by the way?'

'No. Do you?'

And then it was Phyllida's turn to get a shock: but a shock far worse than that given to the critic by her casual question.

He nodded casually, and said:

'Oh, yes . . .' And while Phyllida was too startled to say a word, he added: 'I knew her when she was Anne Gaertner. . . .'

'Gaertner. . . !'

'Ring a bell now?' Phyllida shook her head. 'Gaertner was her second husband's name. I forget the first. And I never knew what she was called before she was married.'

Phyllida would have given much to have been able to ask, *What's she like? Tell me all about her.* But she had not the courage.

All that she found courage to ask was:

'She said that you were rather rude to her—"un-co-operative", she called it. I . . . I wondered why. I mean: why you didn't think the things of Philip's she had worth seeing.'

'My dear lady,' said the critic pettishly, 'I was rude to Anne Greer . . . Gaertner . . . whatever you like to call her; I was rude to her because—well, you just are rude to Anne. At least,' he added, inconsequently, 'I always am. Frankly, I just never did take her seriously. Stupid, pretentious b . . . creature. (Shall we go in to lunch, by the way? I think we'd better. Time's getting on. . . .)' The critic rose, signed to the waiter to collect his hat, gloves and brief-case and deposit them in the cloak-room—remembered that he hadn't washed his hands; followed the hat, gloves and brief-case, with a hasty, 'I shan't be a jiff'; and disappeared from sight. Phyllida, less impetuously, went to the ladies' cloak-room, deep in thought.

'Well, now,' said the critic, rubbing his very clean, sweet-smelling hands, 'let's have a really *nice* lunch, shall we? Not too madly expensive, but something just a little *recherché*? I expect the *maître* can be a little *recherché* when he wants to—for two *rather* special customers, eh?'

The *maître-d'hôtel*, flanked by his assistants, bowed solemnly.

'I am sure we can find you something out of the ordinary, sir, if you and the lady would wish it.'

The critic pored over the menu, looking rather as a schoolboy might look who was let loose to pore over the Queen's stamp collection.

Phyllida thought, *I wonder if he was very hungry as a child?*

But the critic answered her question by announcing, apropos of nothing in particular:

'They have the most wonderful sweetbreads in Weymouth. *Weymouth*—of all places! Mummy was always frightfully keen on seeing that I always ate enough—kids can be so stupid, not only eating the wrong things, but eating nothing at all. They quite often have to be forced. Mummy never actually *forced* me; but she did take an awful lot of trouble *tempting* me, bless her sweet heart! Fancy Weymouth, of all places in the world, for the best sweetbreads! I remember that. I must have been about nine.

'Now let's see. What's really nice today, *Maître?*' he asked, casting his eyes upwards with a winning smile. 'Suggest something really nice. Frankly, I feel too tired to think anything out for myself.'

All the same, as Phyllida noticed, it was the critic who not only selected the dishes, but saw to it that they were the dishes that he, rather than she, preferred. He ordered cantelupe melon, cold, consommé, veal stewed in wine, with mushrooms and black grapes, spinach and Lyonnais potatoes, with a water-ice to follow. They had a very dry sherry with the soup, and a superb Léoville with the veal. And all the time, the critic talked about himself, his Mummy and his dog.

Well . . . not quite all the time. He did remember what had brought him to the 'Maison Gasconne', and what was enabling him to eat this excellent meal at another's expense. So that he did try to remember that Phyllida might possibly be more interested in the book about Philip than in reminiscences, however 'cosy', of the critic's happy hours with Mummy. (It was hard to believe this, but the critic did his best.)

'I didn't tell you,' he said, his mouth crammed with veal; 'I know I didn't; that we've subscribed fifteen thousand copies already? That means, my dear, that the Trade have ordered fifteen thousand copies in advance of publication.'

'Is that good?'

'My dear, it's marv . . . well, it's not really marvellous. It's just really rather good. And, of course, we shall sell much

more than that. But when you consider that the people ordering haven't seen even a dummy copy, it is really rather marvellous, don't you think?"

'Well, I don't know much about these things. But if you say so . . .'

'It's about a thousand in royalties. Well . . . roughly speaking. So you get—let me see—three hundred odd. That will cover your share of the advance, and still leave you a bit over. You can be thinking of buying that new hat or coat you've been coveting! (Now I come to think of it, I shall certainly do a sort of sequel. There ought to be tons and tons and tons of Philip's stuff to be unearthed. . . .)'

Phyllida said, uncertainly:

'I . . . I don't think there can be. I mean: how could there be?'

'Well . . . look at this poem, that I found by the *merest* chance. It's really only a question of a frightful sweat through old magazines and things, at the B.M., and places like that. You don't think so? I can see that, of course. But why? Exactly *why* don't you think so?'

'Well, I . . .'

'You were going to say, because you knew everything Philip did—sold. Weren't you?' The critic smiled—rather spitefully, Phyllida thought. 'But . . . well, you didn't know about this, did you? Why shouldn't there be some more things you haven't heard of yet?' He added, hastily, warned by a narrowing of Phyllida's eyes: 'Oh, for *goodness*' sake, don't get me wrong! I only meant poems and things he perhaps didn't think much of. If it comes to that, this poem I've just found isn't really very much, do you think?'

'No. It's just space-filling,' said Phyllida. Then, pursuing a line of thought suggested to her by an earlier conversation with the critic: 'How much did *Good Breeding* pay for a poem?'

'When Jane Beardsley-Grant paid *at all*,' said the critic, with a most knowledgeable air, 'she really paid rather better than the better-class rags she was always hoping to put out of business. I said: *when* she paid. . . .'

'But if she *did*?'

'Well, *ordinarily*, one gets about a guinea—sometimes two—for *any* poem, no matter who prints it. (It's *terrifying*, the difference in cash-value between poetry and prose; but there you are!)

'I seem to remember hearing that Jane—she never got any

of *my* poetry!—would pay up to four or five. Guineas. He wouldn't have got any more.'

'No,' said Phyllida, staring ahead, 'he wouldn't. If he'd ever got any larger sums, he'd have told me. I know he would.' Abruptly: 'Do you tell your Mother—I mean: does your Mother know every small detail of your work? What you sell, and so forth? What you get for it? Don't tell me that you don't—or, perhaps I should say, haven't—kept a small sum back for yourself? I know men have legitimate expenses that they think women won't appreciate: like standing drinks to people who might conceivably—one of these days—be of use to them. Men never will understand that women do know this, and what they object to in it, is not that men spend money alone, on things not connected with the household, as that their men are spending money which could be better used than on people who couldn't be of use to them in a million years. Yes . . . I can see you're smiling! I bet you can think of a few thirsty prospects helping you to spend your first earnings.'

The critic was smiling, but he said 'seriously', 'It wasn't quite the same with me. Funnily enough, I *did* tell Mummy everything; and she—well, she used to get me to bring everyone home, so that she could vet them. You know: tell at a glance if they'd be . . . I mean:' he corrected himself hastily, 'if I were wasting my time with them. Mummy's *wonderful* like that. But then . . . it isn't everyone who has that sort of help when he's breaking out into the world. Honestly, I do know what you mean; and I think it's terribly sporting of you to take the attitude you do. Some wives—well, Johnny Chaterham's, for one—kick up the most awful row, if he only has one drink, and with somebody *really* important, and *terribly* useful. He daren't spend a *penny*. My dear, he has to take his wage-packet home like some workman, and Belinda doles out what she thinks he ought to have. (And it's *microscopic*, I can tell you!) You . . . well, you've just suggested a reason why Philip mightn't have told you of every sale he had. I think that rather supports my argument that there may be some stuff still to be found, don't you?'

'No,' said Phyllida, firmly, 'unless we can imagine Philip's churning out endless yards of this third-rate verse—and frankly, I can't, for all his fertility of invention—and unless no editor paid more than a guinea or two for his doggerels, I don't believe we'll find anything very much. In quantity, I mean. . . .'

'Now *why*? I'm terribly interested. Just why are you so certain? (I don't say you're mistaken, mark you: I'm a *great* believer in women's intuition—not like some men.) But just what makes you so absolutely positive?'

'Because,' said Phyllida, 'Philip would never have hidden any really big success from me. I can't tell you more than to say that I knew him. I was his wife. And even when he did hide something from me, he never managed to hide the fact that he had done some hiding. I thought it better,' she added, with a little, sad, reminiscent smile, 'to hide something, too: that I could read him like an open book. It was better that my reputation for clear-sightedness should suffer before his silly masculine pride. Do you understand that?'

The critic impulsively put out his hand, and gave Phyllida's a warm clasp.

'I think you're terrific! I really do. I'm so terribly glad we met, and got working together. It's my book, in a way—and now I'll tell you a secret. Yes, really. I *hated* the idea of your having to have a hand in getting the book out. But I'm that sort of person: I don't take easily to collaboration. And now . . . well, I'm glad. I think you've been wonderful. And I know that the book's going to be a success. Tell me . . . No: perhaps I'd better not . . .'

'Yes . . . go on. You've asked so much,' said Phyllida, smiling, 'that one more question can't hurt. *Please* . . .'

'If you promise not to laugh at me? Promise?'

'I promise.'

'Well . . . I was only going to ask if you believed in an after-life? No? (No: I can see you haven't made up your mind.)'

'Do you, then?' Phyllida asked, staring curiously at the thin face now rather flushed with alcohol, much good food and the rich prospects of material success.

'Oh, *yes*! Why . . . what would be the good of going on at *all*, if all this weren't preparatory to something really important? Don't laugh at me, *please*! I'm terribly serious.'

'I wasn't laughing, I assure you. I only wish that I could share your belief. It does, indeed, seem terribly pointless at times—just living out one's span, with nothing to show at the end but death.'

'I think it's so *sad*,' said the critic, looking as though he meant it. 'I . . . well, I really asked, because—if you *had* believed in an after-life—you ought to be so glad that Philip's glad that he's going to be able to do something for you in a

material sense. I don't know whether you read my article in the *Sunday Clarion* of the week-before-last. Oh, there was nothing very original in what I had to say. But what I had to say was this: that an after-life must be taken into account when we're assessing God's justice. (Of course, I didn't put it like that. I have to write as simply as possible, so's to reach every class of reader.)

'But when people say, "Poor chap! he tried so hard, but death overtook him before he could gain the success he was working for," they put death the end of all things. . . .'

'As,' said Phyllida, quietly, 'I'm half inclined to do.'

'So, my dear lady, do a lot of other people. Well . . . I'm not here to lecture you or even convert you. But the way I look at it is this: death isn't the end. It's only a change of state—and not really a fundamental change at that. Philip may not have got the success he was working for in a *bad*—a *selfish*—way; but what was the good success he was working for? Not to sell his books and to get into the papers: not those things by themselves.

'His idea of success was—correct me if I'm wrong; but I don't think I am, somehow—his idea of success was so to arrange his life that you'd get at least all the things which were good for you. Am I wrong?'

'No.'

'Well then! And, if you believe—as I do—that death changes nothing but our incapacity to be blind to what's true and right, you have to admit that Philip will have the satisfaction of having his wish granted, of seeing the thing that he principally worked for come about. He will be famous—I shall see to that!—and that fame will bring you money. Don't you think that will make him happy?'

'I wish I could think so,' said Phyllida.

The critic patted her hand.

'Now, now. You will. I promise you you will. My dear lady: I'll show you some of the letters which reach me from people. All sorts of problems. Real ones. Ones to make any person with half a heart weep and weep and weep. Sometimes I can't sit down and answer them until I've gone out and had a cup of coffee, they're so *tragic*. But I give everyone the same advice: *do* make use of God. That's what He's there for. To be used. I tell people—Mrs. Hammond, I am sincere, believe me that I am!'

'I don't doubt it,' said Phyllida, truthfully, wondering—and

not for the first time in her life—at the paradoxical phenomenon of conflicting—not merely opposite—qualities in one mind, one soul. To hear the completely self-sufficient plead the necessity of entire reliance upon God; to hear incarnate selfishness (or was it really so?) urge the totality of charity and brotherly love—and all this without hypocrisy—would have been madness, were not one constantly encountering the phenomenon of the good and the bad inextricably mixed in one human brain. ‘I don’t doubt it at all. . . .’

‘Because I am sincere. I do believe in God, Mrs. Hammond. I couldn’t write what I do, preach—yes, I admit I preach—what I preach, counsel as I do, unless I very firmly indeed believed in the power and goodness of God. Mrs. Hammond . . . I know what it’s like to feel one’s world collapsing about one’s ears. *I’ve* felt despair. I’ve felt that it wasn’t worth going on.

‘But . . . despair *is* the one unforgivable sin. It *is* worth going on. And it *is* stupid to think one has the ability to do everything for oneself. One hasn’t. We weren’t made to be able to be self-sufficient—not even to be self-reliant, particularly.

‘I . . . Oh, my Lord! is it as late as that? Oh, I do wish I could have gone on with this! I do feel you could be made to understand what’s been of the most wonderful assistance to me.

‘But I must fly. Fly.’

The waiter laid the bill, folded, on a plate, in front of the critic, who looked at the total, and checked the items, before passing it across the table to Phyllida.

‘I’m afraid it’s rather a lot,’ he said, without the least embarrassment. He saw the momentary, and instantly obliterated frown with which Phyllida observed the amount of the bill, and said, ‘If you haven’t got enough change on you, they’ll always take a cheque. They know me here. . . .’

Phyllida, sturdily fighting against the inclination to say, *I didn’t know you could pay so much just for two luncheons*, said:

‘Well . . . it would be more convenient. I’ve got to do a bit of shopping, and I don’t want to run short of cash.’

‘If you’d had an agent, you’d have had to pay ten per cent,’ said the critic, with just the faintest hint of irony. ‘So you can put this down to expenses. It’s cheaper,’ he added, with a malicious smile, ‘than paying an agent. And it *was* a good lunch, wasn’t it?’

‘Wonderful,’ said Phyllida, making the best of things. As

she was writing the cheque, she said, 'Do you want the proofs I've got?'

'Not if you'd like them. I've done the corrections, anyway; and if there's nothing you want taken out—no? good!—then the next thing to wait for is the page-proof. We won't sit on *that*; and the book will be out in good time for Christmas. You should have quite a bit of money by then. You can take me to dinner at Quag's, if you like.'

Phyllida looked up, smiling wanly. Then she put in the date, and crossed the cheque. The waiter's hand slid deftly out, and whisked the cheque away. She said:

'There's one thing I forgot to ask you. About Mrs. Hunter-Greer: yes . . .'

'What about her?' The critic seemed suddenly over-alert, suspicious. 'Were you thinking of. . . ?'

'Yes. Shall I?' She pushed back her chair, and the waiter pulled it back still more. 'I mean: is there any reason why she shouldn't send me these poems and things of Philip's she's got?'

She picked up her gloves and bag, and started to pull on the left-hand glove. The critic, halted on his way to the cloak-room, said abruptly:

'If you can write a letter that Anne Greer won't construe as an invitation to become your bosom friend . . . yes, by all means. But *if* you can, dear lady, then you're a much more accomplished writer than I am. In fact, you're a genius! But if not . . .'

A few minutes later, he joined her in the lounge. She said:

'I don't know which way you're going; but I want to go to Harvey Nichols. Is . . . is Mrs. Hunter-Greer a *sticker*?'

The doorman held the door open for them, and the critic said, 'Taxi, please!'—and, to Phyllida: 'I'm going to Rutland Gate. I'll drop you off at Harvey Nichols, if you like.' They stood on the pavement, watching the doorman, in the middle of the road, semaphore at unseeing taxi-drivers passing along Piccadilly. 'Anne Greer a sticker? Dear lady: she's a . . . I don't know what the word is to describe that peculiar desire of hers to *know* people. It isn't matiness, it isn't to get something out of them. One could understand that. I have to do it myself, sometimes. But that's not the case with her. She doesn't need money or a job . . . or things like that . . . She's . . .'

The doorman caught a taxi-driver's eye, and whistled him up.

Phyllida took advantage of the diversion caused by the capture of the taxi to ask, in a small voice, 'She's . . . rich . . . then?'

The doorman opened the door of the taxi, and Phyllida climbed in. The critic found a shilling, gave it to the doorman, said, 'Four hundred, Rutland Gate—opposite the Clock House; well, I expect you know where I mean. And stop, please, first at Harvey Nichols, to drop this lady.' Then he got in, the door was slammed to by the saluting doorman; and the critic, settling himself comfortably in a corner of the back seat, said, 'She's *madly* rich. Her first husband just died, and her second had a stroke—and died—while he was actually waiting to serve divorce papers on her. Why she *wants* to know people so desperately, I can't for the life of me imagine. Perhaps,' he added, reflectively, looking out of the window on the right, 'she's the lonely sort. . . .'

Suddenly Phyllida felt no longer diffident. She said:

'Tell me all about her. Tell me all you know. You do know her, don't you? And know something about her?'

'I both know her and know a good bit about her. But why. . . ? Why this sudden interest in her? Because she wrote to you that she knew Philip? I doubt very much that she could tell you anything about Philip which was (a) interesting, and (b) anything you didn't already know.'

'I think,' said Phyllida, softly, 'that I'd find anything about Philip interesting now. And . . . well, she *might* be able to tell me something. . . .'

'Perhaps. I doubt it, all the same. And you'll find her a good deal harder to get rid of than to get to know. She should have a job. She's too much spare time to fill, without the right idea of how to fill it. What else,' he asked, in no very gracious way, 'do you wish me to tell you about her?'

'What she looks like; how old she is; what she wears; that sort of thing. I'm interested in her. I'd like to know. . . .'

'Are you,' said the critic, peering out of the window at the Duke of Wellington's statue, 'not just the teeny-weeniest bit . . . jealous?'

Phyllida smiled, because the remark hit upon the truth.

'How can I tell until you've told me what she looks like?'

The critic shrugged his shoulders. They were thin, very well-clad shoulders.

'Oh . . . if that's all that's needed! She's not everybody's type, of course. . . .'

'Who is?'

'Yes. But—let's get this straight (I haven't given her a thought in years!)—she's very *much* not everybody's style.'

'How old? Young? Elderly?'

Again the shrug.

'A good *bit* older than you. I don't see how she can be a day under fifty . . .'

'Fifty. . . !'

(But why didn't the load shift?)

'Yes, quite that. But, of course, with all Anne's money, you can thumb your nose at age fairly successfully. She watches her weight like a boxer in training, and—oh, you know! Elizabeth Arden's entire collection; and all the rest of it.'

'But . . . Yes, but . . . I mean: what does she look like? Is she fair? Is she dark? Is she good-looking?'

'She is what they would call "remarkably handsome". They say that when she was young (which must have been before *I* met her) she was most beautiful. (Well, I can *see* it, really. . . .)

'She has a perfect figure, if this is what you want to know. She walks most gracefully, so that anyone can see at half a glance that she must have been a mannequin once. Nobody else has quite that too-perfect carriage. She is extremely dark—and the hairdresser will keep her so—at least, so long as he's paid. She is *extrêmement bien soignée*—being, I suppose, one of the twenty best-dressed women in any country where she happens to be. (Does all this depress you, by the way? It should. . . .)'

'It doesn't,' Phyllida said defensively. 'And I don't see why it should. Why should it?'

'Because it makes you reflect how disproportionate are the rewards of honest worth and—well—dishonest worth. I . . . where was I? (And here's Harvey Nichols, by the way!) Oh . . . yes: very dark. Very well-dressed. And . . . well, of course, she *must* be attractive. She's quiet—until she loses her temper. (But then, you can say that of a lot of women fundamentally different from Anne Gaertner . . . Greer. Anne Greer.) And you want to get out. They've got the Autumn Collection in, by the way. Is that what you wanted to see?'

'Yes,' said Phyllida, waiting until the critic had opened the door, and got out, before she stirred herself. 'I enjoyed the luncheon, and . . . and thank you for what you've done—what you're doing for Philip. . . .'

'Dear lady!' he said, putting out a thin, white, bony hand

(a little pink on the joints), 'and for you! A pleasure. I shall look forward to our next meeting. Tell me, *will* you write to La Greer?'

Phyllida nodded.

'Yes . . . I think so. It can't do any harm.'

The critic pursed his mouth.

'Yes. I see. I suppose not. On the other hand,' he said, raising his hat, and turning towards the open door of the taxi, 'it could be quite the reverse. Good-bye!'

Phyllida watched the taxi drive off. She said to herself:

'I'd better go to Harrods afterwards, and get some really impressive writing-paper . . .'

If Alan Cartwright was, as some complained, over-voluble in the pulpit he was reticent to the point of secretiveness in regard to his private affairs—and what Alan Cartwright held to be his private affairs were almost all the matters that he could avoid sharing with his neighbours.

Thus, though he could not avoid—nor would have avoided had he been able—the public knowledge of the fact that he had given something like an enthusiastic permission to Phyllida to put the memorial tablet on the wall of Hasling Church, it was not until an Inspector, a Sergeant and a Constable of the Northsexshire Constabulary arrived, on the afternoon of one market-day, to remove the tablet by force, that Hasling folk became aware that their Rector had defied and flouted Episcopal authority. (In Colonel Somers's phrase, 'Just told his Lordship to go to hell!')

Accompanying the three police-officers were three workmen, carrying hammers, wooden mallets and cold-chisels. The Inspector carried a very legal-looking paper, which was his authority to remove a certain memorial tablet, affixed to Hasling Church without permission of the Lord Bishop of Rowcester; and maintained there in direct opposition to His Lordship's lawful order.

The six men had come to see that the offending fixture was to be a fixture no longer. And it is possible that they might have done their work as unnoticed as unhindered (since Hasling men and women—and even children—did not hang around their parish church on market-days), and gone quietly off with their booty, had the Inspector not decided, before beginning his work, to look in at *The Dunmow Flitch* for a

couple of pints in the back snug. His assistants—all five of them—entered the snug with their leader; and as five men means five rounds; and as, after five rounds, there is a natural inclination to have at least five more; the Inspector and his companions stayed in the *Flitch's* snug until long after the tavern's normal afternoon closing-time. (Since, on market-days, the Hasling public-houses opened continuously from ten in the morning until ten at night, the Inspector had reluctantly to tear himself away from the pleasant atmosphere of the snug before the late autumn light had faded. 'Not that it'll take us more 'n a few minutes to 'oick off a stone tablet. Cement'll 'ardly 'ave 'ad toime ter set 'aard-like be naow,' said the Inspector.)

It is true that the actual removal of the tablet took not more than ten minutes. As the Inspector had said, the cement had had no time to set hard, and it was an easy matter to prise the slab away from the wall. But Essex and Northsexshire peasants like to take their time over a job; and if the job can't be made to extend over an hour, be sure that the talking will stretch the job out to its proper limits.

For the Inspector and his crew had not gone unaccompanied to the church. The irrepressible inquisitiveness which is the universal characteristic of the countryman had caused a number of drinkers in *The Flitch* to finish up even as the Inspector had turned the bottom of his pint-pot skyward; and the little procession which had set out from the tavern had swollen to the proportions of a crowd by the time that the 'demolition squad'—as it came later to be called—passed through the lych-gate into the churchyard.

In the manner of most of our country churches at four o'clock in the afternoon of a week-day, Hasling Old Church was deserted: there was not even the grave-digger to be seen, trimming the turf between those grassy mounds under which Hasling's mute inglorious Miltons gently merged into the earth which lapped them about.

'Not that I need no one,' said the Inspector, to the world in general. 'This 'ere's'—holding up and waving the blue paper—'a full authority to remove a certain memorial tablet, to wit, one being or purporting to be erected in commemoration of one, Squadron-Leader Philip Armitage Hammond, deceased; which tablet, having been affixed to the chancel wall of the Parish Church of St. Mary Ever Virgin, Haslingby-Buckstable with Fripplesham Extra and St. Ragnulph

Monachorum'—the Inspector was refreshing his memory by constant glances at the blue paper—'without a licence or faculty having been applied for or granted by the Right Reverend Father in God, James Henry, by Divine Providence Lord Bishop of Rowcester, it is hereby ordered by the said James Henry, Lord Bishop of Rowcester, that the said memorial tablet to the said Squadron-Leader Philip Armitage Hammond, be removed from the chancel wall of the Parish Church of St. Mary Ever Virgin, Hasling-by-Buckstable, and that the said tablet be conveyed to some place not within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Right Reverend Father in God, James Henry, by Divine Providence Lord Bishop of Rowcester. I'm not going to read no more. That's enough. Well . . .'

The Inspector leading the way, the crowd entered the church, all the men—including the police-officers—reverently doffing their caps, dropping their voices to whispers, and treading a tiptoe. The Inspector turned to a man pressing eagerly into his back, 'crowding' him; and said, 'If you're so keen to see what's to be seen, you can come to the front o' me, and show me where this 'ere memorial tablet's been put up.'

The man—it was old Charlie Smeeth, whose profession (never very apparent) had been held to have suffered when motor-cars ousted horses—needed no second invitation. He hopped around the Inspector, and shuffled briskly forward, the Inspector, with the crowd close behind, bringing up the rear.

'That's it, Guv!' Charlie said, halting in front of Philip's memorial, and pointing out the tablet with a skinny, trembling finger. 'There's the idolatry of the Scarlet Woman, which shall be cast down like the Golden Calf and the Children of Moab.'

'You'll get cast out of 'ere in double-quick time, if you can't keep a civil tongue in yer head!' said the Inspector, ripe with the long enjoyment of undisputed authority. 'What's all this rubbidge about idolatry?'

'Ain't the Pope responsible, then?' a man's voice piped up in the rear, as though the speaker were merely reassuring himself on a point concerning which there could be very little argument.

The Inspector raised a hand for silence, and read the inscription. Not until he had conscientiously—and very slowly—read every word (including the *E. Judkins and Son, Sculptors, Hasling*, in minuscule letters at the lower right-hand

corner of the slab), did he turn, his hand again raised for silence, and say:

'Now, you people: just a few words. First of all, this is God's House—so I'll 'ave a little less noise, for a start. Right? That's all right, then.

'Second: all of you—any of you, come to that—can just stow this talk about idolatry and Scarlet Women and the Pope and the Children of Moab—all of which haven't got nothing to do with me being 'ere today. There's no idolatry, so far 's I can see—in my official capacity or not in my official capacity.

'I haven't come 'ere today because there's even anything wrong with this 'ere tablet, which—so far 's I can see—is a very nice-writ memorial to a gentleman who served his country well.'

Fred Shipton, in the edge of the crowd, said, 'Hear, hear!'—altering it quickly (as he Remembered Where He Was) to 'Amen!'

'But,' said the Inspector, holding up the blue paper, 'there's a way of doing things legal, and there's a way of doing things not so legal—as there's some people 'ere I could name (but won't) who know perfectly well.

'Still, I haven't come here to pinch a brace of poachers; so I'll just say that there's nothing wrong with this 'ere tablet *as* a tablet; and speaking for myself, I'm sorry that my jooties cause me to 'ave to remove it.

'But Rector didn't get no authority from the Bishop to put it up, and it's therefore an illegal fixture. Accordingly, my unpleasant jooty is to see that it comes down. All right?'

Fred Shipton, to be on the safe side, said, 'Amen!'

The Inspector glared at the speaker.

'Any more jokes out of you, Fred, and I'll have you in handcuffs! Now listen, you folk: why I've gone to the trouble of explaining all this to you is because I don't want to hear no more nonsense about the Pope—or anyone else. I don't want you to go getting wrong ideas, and mixing up what I'm doing 'ere with what I had to do six months ago over to Randleton Infra, where Father Schofield had a lot of statues and such.

'There's nothing wrong with this tablet. Got that? Good! All there is, is that it's illegal. And the Pope's had no more to do with it than I have. Now . . . All right, you men: you better start getting it down. Go easy now. I don't want this 'ere tablet hurt in any way.'

Under the direction of the foreman, the two subordinate

workmen took over the limelight from the Inspector. The crowd pressed in. Some youths had the temerity to stand on pews, until angrily ordered down by the police-sergeant. The police-constable, at a sign from the sergeant, began to push the crowd back. There were some angry mutterings, until the Inspector said, 'Any more disturbance, and I'll clear the church!'

Fred Shipton—well at the rear—said, 'You got no authority to clear a church, Inspector. A church 's God's House. Said so yerself two minute back.'

'I've got the right, Fred Shipton, to stop any behaviour which, in my opinion, looks like causing a breach of the peace. Another word out of you, and you'll come along with me. Now shut up! How's it going, Mr. Symes? I wouldn't like you to do no damage, to the tablet *or* to the wall. . . .'

'It'll come away quite easy,' said the foreman, watching his men. 'We done this job before. We won't hurt the tablet, nor not the wall neether. Where's the tablet got to go, though, when we've taken it off the wall? Are you taking it with you, Inspector?'

The Inspector scratched his head. The question had not so far arisen. His orders had been to remove the tablet from the wall, and convey said tablet to some place outside the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop. What that place was to be had not been specified; but it was now apparent that a decision would have to be taken concerning the tablet's disposal.

The Inspector said, 'Well, they never said nothing to me about that. But . . . well, I suppose that the fit and proper person to have charge of this 'ere memorial tablet is the lady who paid for it?'

'Or you could take it round to Judkinses,' a voice suggested. 'They were the ones as carved it; and Judkins knows how to look after them tablets, like.'

This time, the speaker got no rebuke. The Inspector, considering the suggestion, found it the most satisfactory.

'All right, then. I think that's the best idea yet. All right, Mr. Symes, you better cart it round to Judkins, and tell him to hold it, pending, like.'

'Why not Mrs. Hammond?' Fred Shipton asked, aggressively. 'She's the one who owns it? Why Judkins? What's he got to do with it, once's done the carving and delivered it to the lady as 'as paid to have it done?'

'Fred,' said the Inspector; 'you've had one warning. This is the last. One more word out of you, me lad, and I'll charge you!'

'You'll charge me!' Fred sneered. 'Of course you'll charge me, same as you been doing this last thirty year. But you can't trump up no so-called evidence you caught me in Colonel Somers's woods: so what you going to charge me with now?'

'Obstructing the police in the execution of their duties,' said the Inspector, briskly. 'And now dry up, there's a good chap!'

'I'll tell you folks,' said Fred, 'why this 'ere lovely bit of work is going to be carted off to Judkins's yard, and possibly—I said *possibly*, mark you!—broken, when it's laying around there, in everybody's way. I'll tell you why it ain't going to be taken, reverent-like, back to the lady who it belongs to. Do you know why?'

'No,' said the Inspector, 'and neether do you, Fred Shipton. Now you just pipe down, and remember where you are.'

'I know where I am,' said Fred. 'I don't need you to tell me! You're not on oath before the magistrates now, telling *them* where I was, when, in fact, I was at home, fast asleep, as my missus could have told them if they'd had the civility to listen to her.'

'But I can tell you why this 'ere stone's going to be taken back to Judkins's yard, like an old bit o' rubbish, and just chucked there, and good riddance to it! I'll tell you, Inspector—yes, and all of you! It's because the Inspector feels brave enough to persecute me, and blokes like me; but he don't feel so brave when it comes to telling Mrs. Hammond that she ought to be ashamed of herself for thinking what her dead husband done is the fit and proper thing to put up on a church wall. Why, I wonder,' said Fred, now quite carried away by his sense of injustice, 'you don't pull her—yes, *and* Rector—in on the same charge them blokes was pulled in on the other day, for writing dirty words on the side of the Tithe Barn.'

The Inspector said, 'I'll charge you outside. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Hammond is not in any way in the wrong, folk. If anyone's in the wrong, it's Rector—and I expect that that was just an oversight. Everything will be all right. You see.'

Fred Shipton said, as loudly as his ingrained reverence for churches would let him:

'But if Mrs. Hammond's husband had been a bloody conchy, she could have shoved up a tablet the size of a billiard-table,

and the thing could 've stayed here till Kingdom Come, and not a squeak out of anyone!

A low murmur of approval halted the Inspector, who had been about to order Fred Shipton's immediate arrest. It was perhaps not altogether astonishing that the Inspector should hesitate to arrest Fred now, when he was obviously bent on stirring up trouble, even though the Inspector had contemplated Fred's arrest when Fred had done nothing more than to ask a few innocent questions.

The fact is that, when that murmur of approval came from the crowd, the Inspector realized that force would have to give place to diplomacy, if Big Trouble was to be avoided. He was no fool; and he had a peasant's shrewdness in summing up ordinary situations.

There was nothing extraordinary here; nothing to baffle him.

It was turned four of a market-day. All the men present—and a good many of the women—had had too much to drink. The children, though they had not been drinking, had become slightly intoxicated with the freedom that they always allowed themselves on market-days.

A practised eye ran over the crowd, calculating its numbers.

About sixty . . . (As many as that? They must have got wind of what was up, and been coming in, like, ever since the first batch had attached itself to the Inspector. He found himself wishing he'd told them to go home, and had put Constable Parham to guard the lych-gate.)

Fred Shipton, of course—as a much-convicted poacher—had got it in for the Inspector. Fair enough! But Fred Shipton, for all his loud mouth, wasn't difficult to handle. The Inspector summed up: yes . . . it was some of the women who would be the danger; their inflammable tempers might so easily catch alight at the flame of Fred Shipton's calculated insolence. How Fred'd love to get his own back by stirring up the mob; by inciting them to obstruction of the police; by forcing the Inspector to choose between two equally horrible decisions—to let the mob have its way, and bow to its will; or to charge some half-hundred of the most established residents of Hasling with riotous behaviour (to which, since the riotous behaviour had taken place in a church, the charge of sacrilege would probably have to be added!).

The Inspector had been born in Hasling, as had his ancestors; son-to-father backwards into the shadows of a time beyond

which the memory of man reacheth not. There was not a face in that church which belonged to someone whom the Inspector had not known since his earliest childhood. Weighing matters up, the Inspector decided to appeal, not to the majesty of the Law, but to the friendship that he thought he might count on; to the clan-spirit of the village that they and he owned to as their common birthplace.

'Well now,' he said, in a conciliatory voice, and addressing himself directly to Fred Shipton, for all that he was talking to every member of the crowd; 'don't you think we're getting things wrong a bit?'

'I ain't getting things wrong!' Fred shouted. 'I say, if that's all the respect you've got for the widow of a man who done what Mr. Hammond done—go on, folks: read what's carved on that tablet you'll never see again in your lives, if *he* has his way! Read it! See what Mr. Hammond's King thought of him—yes, and the President of France, too, for that matter! *They* had more respect for him than what these blokes have! I say, if that's all the respect a gentleman gets for having done his bit for his King and Country, then all I got to say is, he oughter copied the Inspector, and got himself in a reserved occupation!'

The growls of approval had alarmed the Inspector—at least, warned him to go warily. The laugh which followed Fred's speech merely infuriated him. In a voice which set up rattling echoes in the empty spaces of the trussed roof, he shouted:

'That's a nice thing to say, when you know damn' well I tried me hardest to join up. An' they wouldn't let me! You know that, Fred; and I call you a liar to yer weasel face if you deny a word of it. . . !'

'We know all about that!' Fred taunted. He was aware that, for the moment at least, he had the crowd with him. Whatever they may have thought of the Inspector as a person whom most of them had known for years, there was the fundamental, the inherited and innate and ingrained dislike of Authority to turn them momentarily against the Inspector as the representative of Authority, and to bring them temporarily on the side of the man who dared to stand up to Authority's representative. 'We know,' Fred shouted, observing, with a shrewd understanding of its significance, the deepening of the Inspector's already florid colour. 'We know how hard you tried to get them to un-reserve you! Ask the blokes who went! Yes . . .' pointing a trembling finger—'ask the dead man there how hard it was to get in, *if you wanted to!*'

It was at this point that Mr. Chrimes, who had—seeing the steady and hurrying trickle of people making their way through the lych-gate—stopped his car to investigate the source of some unusual compulsion (for what else would take so many people to church at tea-time on a week-day?), and had followed two old women into church, decided to slip away.

He felt that it would not be fair on the young lady to make Phyllida a witness of this unseemly brawl; but the bank-manager did feel that the time had come when the presence of the Rector was no longer merely desirable.

The Inspector had not seen Mr. Chrimes come; and he did not see the bank-manager go. The police-officer might have forced himself to be calm, to refuse to rise to Fred Shipton's so obvious—and, really, so clumsy—manœuvres.

But the Inspector *had* wished to join up. He had tried his hardest to get into khaki; had, in fact, made such a nuisance of himself with his persistent requests to be allowed to put off his policeman's uniform, if it were only to exchange it for the khaki of the Corps of Military Police; that his superiors had at last threatened him with disciplinary measures should he refuse to accept—Once And For All (do you understand, Inspector? Good! Then see you bear it in mind!)—the decision of his superiors.

So that now, in the discharge of a duty that he found horribly distasteful, to be accused of cowardice, when he had been carpeted and as near as dammit kicked out for protesting against not having been allowed to join up, was an injustice that the Inspector had not the strength to endure with patience. He knew well that the sniggers and titters and laughs of the crowd spoke no real acceptance of Fred's charges; not even a warm indignation that the tablet should have been condemned. They did not speak even sympathy for Mrs. Hammond or solidarity with the Rector. No . . . they were just noises whose one purpose was to make him hopping mad with anger.

He knew this perfectly well.

None the less, he knew that he was hopping mad with anger.

Had Fred Shipton been a little nearer to the Inspector, there is no doubt that Fred—that weasel of a man—would have felt the weight of the Inspector's powerful and ham-like fist.

The Inspector was shouting now; shouting so loudly that people who had not seen the procession leave *The Fitch* were

being attracted into the church by the noise. (And somebody had switched all the lights on.)

The Inspector shouted:

'I'll have you up for slander, personally. Never mind what I sees done to you official. You listen to me, Fred Shipton: you're nothing but a lazy, good-for-nothing little thief. No . . . and never have been! You don't like me, because I don't see the joke in you robbing anyone silly enough to leave anything lying about.

'I've sent you to prison a dozen times already; but, by golly! you'll cop it *this* time, me lad! I'll take you to the 'Sizes for this, you see if I don't.'

'Garn!' said Fred, safe with forty people between the Inspector and himself. 'Don't talk so soft. . . !'

Suddenly the forty people were no longer a shield for Fred Shipton. Two vast hands, at the end of two long arms, sent them sprawling, as the Inspector clove his way through the mob. He was after Fred Shipton; but Fred Shipton was not the only one who had 'asked for it' that afternoon. The Inspector, fast as he moved, settled scores right and left as he went through the crowd as a horse goes through a paper disc. The sniggers and open laughter changed abruptly to cries of anger and alarm. 'Ere! look out!'; 'Oi! Mind where you're going!'; 'Oo the 'ell d'you think *you're* shovin'?' and so forth followed the Inspector's bulldozing leap through the crowd.

But if the Inspector, weighing all of sixteen stone (and a lot of it fat) could move quickly, Fred Shipton, the poacher, could move at a rate no slower. He had accused the Inspector of cowardice, and the poacher was prepared to taunt and goad the big man so long as only a moderate danger of reprisals threatened.

But now something more than ordinary reprisals threatened. The Inspector, Fred realized in one sudden alarming burst of comprehension, had forgotten that he was a policeman; had forgotten that he was in church; had, in fact, forgotten everything but the need to revenge himself, thoroughly and instantly, upon Fred Shipton, who had dared to make a fool of the Inspector before about a hundred of Hasling's idlest—and therefore most talkative—residents.

Fred turned as quickly as any of the sharp-eared animals that he trapped nightly. The empty space between Fred and the door looked suddenly the most inviting of all sights.

Fred ran silently, on rubber-soled lightweight shoes; with

the Inspector making all the noise as he pounded down the tiled side-aisle, shouting, 'You just wait, Fred Shipton! You wait till I get me hands on you! You wait, you dirty little snipe!'

Fred didn't wait. He weighed no more than eight stone; and he was used to having to run for his safety. He was showing the Inspector a good six yards, when he reached the door.

It was unfortunate, both for the Rector and for the Inspector, that Mr. Cartwright should have chosen that moment to pull back a leaf of the double-door, and, first, to be sent flying backwards into Mr. Chrimes's arms, and, second, to be scandalized by the sight of his church full of shouting, fighting people, following a police-officer who seemed to be having a fit of some sort.

'What the deuce. . . !' the Rector began. But Fred had wriggled round the man he had knocked flying, and was off down the path which led to the lych-gate. Mr. Chrimes got the Rector to his feet just as the Inspector, red-faced and panting, took in, with one horrified glance, the altered situation.

The Rector said:

'Inspector . . . What is the meaning of this disturbance?' He looked at the open mouths at the Inspector's rear. 'Was the man caught stealing?'—for Mr. Cartwright, like most other people in Hasling, knew Fred Shipton's reputation.

A silence fell upon the church, and the Inspector paled. He shuffled his feet, and made an effort to look the Rector in the eye. At last he said, with a praiseworthy attempt to look as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, 'He was trying to obstruct me in the discharge of my duties, sir. That was all.'

'And you interpret your duty as embracing the right to brawl in church, Inspector? Why were you chasing him? Are your subordinates paralysed? Or is it only your own discretion which has gone to sleep?' The Rector brushed past the Inspector, and walked up the aisle. No one moved. No one said a word.

Even the workmen, who had, at that moment, eased the tablet away from the wall, stood like stocks, with the heavy piece of stone held in three pairs of hands.

The Rector opened the gate in the Communion-rail and, standing a foot or two within the sanctuary, faced the crowd.

'Will everybody go into the pews, please!' he said, with a

sort of dispassionate peremptoriness. 'All, that is, except the police-officer in charge.' The crowd, with anxious, sheepish glances towards the rigid, self-possessed figure before the altar, shuffled and shambled into the pews—all showing a marked inclination to leave the front seats to others. The workmen gently lowered the tablet until they might rest it against the wall; then they, too, joined the crowd in the pew-seats.

The Rector said, in a clear, carrying voice:

'Mr. Chrimes: be good enough to see that anyone who wishes to come in does so in an orderly manner. Inspector . . . will you come up here, please, and explain to me—the Rector of this parish—what was happening when Mr. Chrimes fetched me from the Conservative Club?'

The Inspector's great boots rang a lively chime on the cast-iron grating as he strode up the aisle, the blue paper very prominent in his hand. His head was held high, and his back was straight as he marched forward; but his eye could not hold the calm, appraising, condemning eye of the Rector. There was a faint pallor overlaying the Inspector's ruddy cheeks long before he got to the altar-rail. Perhaps the lingering similarity of a church to the court of law from which its plan was originally taken struck some unpleasant chord of memory in the Inspector; but, for the life of him, he could not throw off the feeling, not so much of guilt, as of being a prisoner hauled before the bar of justice. He wished that the Rector had at least left the gate in the rails open, and had not chosen to stand, as it were in judgement, within the brass-capped, wrought-iron grille.

But the Inspector's voice was steady enough—even though it was too loud with a half-insolent defiance—as he said, holding the paper out:

'What was happening when you was at the Conservative Club, sir, was that I was carrying out me jooty, and seeing that a memorial tablet, affixed to the wall of this church without a permission, licence or faculty from His Lordship the Bishop, was removed. I have my authority here, sir, if you'll be good enough to look at it; and may I say that you were well aware that this would be bound to happen?'

'No, Inspector,' said the Rector, coldly, 'you may not say that. You are here in an official capacity. You must restrict what you say to official pronouncements. Your private opinions do not interest me, and they are out of place here. Let me see that document, please.' The Rector held out his hand, and

the Inspector—hating himself at that moment even more than he was hating the Rector—moved towards the altar-rail, opened the gate with clumsy fingers ('All thumbs, damn' things!' he said to himself), and gave the paper to the Rector, who, with a slight, half-contemptuous nod, bade the officer stay where he was.

Mr. Cartwright, in a deeper hush than the church had ever known, read the paper through. Then:

'But this . . .' tapping it with a forefinger—'is addressed to me, Inspector. Why was I not given it until now?'

'It was addressed to you, sir,' said the Inspector, boldly; taking a desperate courage from the silence—the hostile, malicious silence—behind him; 'but . . . well, I had me orders to remove the tablet. . . .'

'You mean,' said Mr. Cartwright, softly, 'that this paper is a mere formality. . . .'

'I wouldn't go so far as to say that, sir,' said the Inspector, falling into the trap so neatly laid for him, and seeing the trap only in the moment of its catching him.

'Ah! You mean: it is not a mere formality. . . . But you decided to treat it as such?'

'No, sir. Not at all. . . .'

'Oh, but *yes*, Inspector! You said to yourself: Mr. Cartwright cannot oppose my removing this tablet to the memory of a gallant officer without laying himself open to a charge of obstructing the police in the discharge of their duties. But even if he were to seek to prevent my removing it, I should still take the offending tablet off the wall. Eh, Inspector?'

'I know me jooty when I see it; and' with a flash of spirit, 'I carry out the orders of my superior officers.'

'And so,' the Rector continued, as though the Inspector had not spoken, 'you decided that this paper was so much a mere formality that it could wait until it suited your convenience to let me have it? Me . . . The person to whom it was addressed! The paper which told me that you had the authority to bring along your demolition squad and hack the wall of God's House to pieces. You thought that it was unimportant that I should not have had this paper first?'

'That paper's my authority for what I done, sir!' said the Inspector, stubbornly.

'Yes,'—more mildly—'I admit that. But—look at me, Inspector, please!—does this paper give you authority to turn this church into the sort of bear-garden that it was when

Mr. Chrimes—very rightly, too!—came post-haste to fetch me? Does it?' And, as the Inspector merely looked with dry, glazing eyes at the altar-frontal (for he had to look somewhere; and he could not find the courage to outstare the Rector): 'And why did you have to bring a hundred witnesses with you? To see that you carried out your duties as ordered?'

The Inspector said angrily, 'I *never* brought them! I never brought them! They just tagged along. They never got no invitation from *me*, sir!'

'Just tagged along, eh?'—in that quietly sarcastic manner which, to persons of the Inspector's sort, is more infuriating than any shouting rage. 'How did they know where you were going? What you were about to do? Did you tell them, Inspector? Did you want a little moral support?'

The police-officer said cunningly, 'I'm not bound to account to you, sir, for the presence of your parishioners in this church. It's not within my discretion, sir, to supervise the people who come to church. I can't say who's to come and who's not to come. That's your business, sir,' he added, insolently. 'What's more: I have no power to order someone out of church. . . .'

'So long as he isn't creating a disturbance. . . ?'

The Inspector coughed. Suddenly, he looked as though he would like to do—and in the very same place—what the four knights did to Thomas Becket. He said, 'Even then . . .'

'Ah! Was that why you were chasing Fred Shipton out of the church, Inspector? Because he was making a disturbance? Come: it's still my church, even though you do have authority to tamper with its furnishings. Why were you chasing Fred Shipton out of my church, Inspector? Come'—gently—'there must have been a reason—a *good* reason. Won't you tell me? Or *can't* you tell me?'

'No, Rector . . . but I can!' a voice shouted from the very back of the pews.

The Inspector turned.

'You shut up!' he shouted, in no softer a voice.

'No,' said the Rector, 'he will not shut up! Stand out, whoever spoke then! Ah!'—as a small, shrivelled-up man, dressed in old black covert-twill, stepped boldly out into the aisle—'it's you, Dick Waite! Well, Dick, suppose you give us *your* version of what happened. . . ?'

'Him and that Fred Shipton are as thick as thieves!' the Inspector protested. 'Everyone knows that!'

'I can still tell the truth though!' said Dick, angrily.

'That's a matter of opinion!'

'Now, now! Waite! speak up! I want to know what has happened in my absence. Why was Fred Shipton running away?'

'Because the copper was a-goin' to arrest him. Let him say if that's the truth or not!'

'Indeed! And were you going to arrest Shipton, Inspector?'

'I would if I'd got me hands on him, an' all!'

'Why?'

'Obstruction . . . ' surlily.

There was a loud laugh from the crowd; a laugh that the Rector heard with a lift of his eyebrows.

Dick Waite shouted, 'That's what *he* says, Rector! But I'll tell you the truth. And there's everyone here, bar them coppers and one or two lick-spittles I could name but won't, who'll bear me out.' The murmur of approval which followed this statement showed the Rector clearly where the crowd's sympathies lay. 'What 'appened was this 'ere. Up comes three coppers and three blokes with chisels an' that. In they goes to *The Flitch*, and there they stay having a pint, for a couple of hours. . . .'

'And what's the harm in that?' the Inspector muttered.

'Well,' said Dick, 'you're always talking about your duty; so perhaps you'd like to answer that question yerself! Anyrates, Rector, they was full of what they was going to do—so we all ups and goes along with 'em, when they leaves *The Flitch*.'

'Did the Inspector hinder you in any way, Dick?'

'Me, Rector? He don't like me very much. . . .'

'The crowd generally. Did you, Inspector?'

'Why should I?' the Inspector grunted, cheering himself up with the thought of what he would do to Dick Waite the next time that he pulled the little poacher in. 'Why should I stop 'em?'

'Very well. You didn't. Then what, Dick?'

'Well,' said the poacher, walking up the aisle a few steps, 'then we come along 'ere, and then the Inspector gives orders Mrs. 'Ammond's tablet's to be took down. (He flashed that there blue paper of hisn around, so's we'd know everything was being done legal-like.) And . . . well, then them other blokes started in on getting it off the wall. The tablet. . . .'

'Yes, Dick. But where does Fred Shipton come in? Did he try to prevent the Inspector's taking the tablet down? That would have been obstruction. Did Fred try to interfere, Dick?'

'Nah!' said Waite, looking as though he would have liked to spit, to show his contempt; 'Fred never interfered. All he said was, "If there'd been a tablet shoved up to some bloody conchy, the tablet could have stayed there till Kingdom Come." Eh? Am I right, everyone?' There was a deep murmur, broken by cries of 'Course you're right, Dicko-boy!' 'That's the God's-own gospel-truth, 'swelp me bob!' and 'You tell Rector the truth, Dick-lad!'

'And then he said, Rector, as it seemed funny that Mr. 'Ammond's King thought quite a lot of him, as so did the President of France; but when his widow spends her savings getting Judkins to carve up a nice bit of fancy marble, so's people won't forget what Mr. 'Ammond done to the 'Uns, and what the 'Uns finally done to Mr. 'Ammond, along comes the coppers with their crows and jimmies, and takes the tablet down.'

'And is that why the Inspector chased—was chasing—Fred, as I came in?'

Dick laughed, and the crowd joined in.

'Bless yer, no, sir! There's Fred, letting off fourteen to the dozen about the dirty way gentlemen like Mr. 'Ammond gets treated—an' all of us 'ere agreein' with every word Fred says—when Fred says, "It's a pity Mr. 'Ammond joins up and gets hisself killed", which it is; and then Fred says, "Perhaps Mr. 'Ammond ought to done what the Inspector done, and got hisself in a reserved occupation." And . . .'

What Dick Waite had to say now was drowned in a gusty laughter which stirred the bats in the belfry, and set up mumbling over-tones in the great bronze bells themselves. The laughter was for the memory of the first mention of the Reserved Occupation; of the rampaging anger of the Inspector; of the exasperated police-officer's wild threats, and of the tormentor's prudent and headlong flight. And one memory recalling another, they remembered how Fred had cannoned into the Rector, and sent him backwards into the arms of the little bank-manager! They laughed afresh; and their laughter renewed itself. It seemed that they would never stop their laughing. . . .

The Rector let them have their laugh out. (In any case, he was powerless, as he knew, to curtail the laughter. *Let it exhaust itself . . . and then we'll see. . . .*)

He glanced at the Inspector's face—and one glance was enough to set pity in motion; struggling to free itself from the

dead-weight of indignation which overlaid it. But the pity was too weak to overthrow the indignation, and the impulse to spare the Inspector the trouble that he had brought upon himself died at its birth. All the same . . .

The Rector held up a hand, and the laughter, which was thinning out, stopped altogether.

'All right, Dick! Go back to your pew! Thank you for telling me what happened. Inspector: I see that your men have removed the tablet from the wall. That . . . that rather completes what you came to do, doesn't it?'

'Except,' said the Inspector, with sullen insolence (for the laughter had wounded him in some psychically vital spot), 'that my orders are to remove it to some place outside His Lordship's jurisdiction, *as well* as taking it from the wall. . . .'

'Or,' the Rector suggested gently, 'are your orders merely to see that it *is* removed to some place outside His Lordship's ecclesiastical jurisdiction? Must you remove the tablet yourself?'

The tormented man grunted something: even he did not know quite what. The Rector accepted this as he chose.

'Very well, then. I shall make myself responsible for the tablet. I accepted it from Mrs. Hammond—on her behalf, rather—and she will naturally look to me to see that it is looked after.'

'You can do what you like with it,' said the Inspector, suddenly deciding that nothing was worth his putting up with more of this terrifying persecution. 'You can do what you please with it, sir; so long as you don't put it back on that wall. . . .'

The Rector, raising his voice, said to the foreman:

'You, Jeffcoate! Take that tablet out to Mr. Chrimes's car, and see you don't hurt it in any way.'

'Yes, sir,' said Jeffcoate, touching his forehead.

'And you had better go along, all three of you, with Mr. Chrimes. He'll want some help getting the tablet into his house. All right? Understood?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, then: what are you standing there for like a lot of stuffed dummies? Get a move on!'

In a dead silence, the three workmen got a move on, and with solemn, measured tread, they passed through the door that Mr. Chrimes was holding open.

The Rector said, 'I suggest that all you good people now go back to what you were doing when you decided to come along

and see what was happening in your church. I hope,' he added, with a wry smile which brought some answering titters from Dick Waite, Harry Tonks, and some others of their sort, 'that I shall see as large and attentive a congregation on Sunday. Anyhow . . . try to make it so.

'Good night, everyone!'

'Good night, sir!' they chorused, as they began to troop out.

'And that might as well go for you, Inspector,' said the Rector.

'I don't see why you come down so hard on a man, sir, for just doing his jooty. They tell me you was a full colonel, sir. You ought to be the first to support a man taking orders and carrying them out. To support discipline, sir. Beg your pardon, sir, but as man to man, I'm rather surprised by your attitude.'

'I *was* a full colonel, Inspector, and I have no interest in your views on what my conduct should be. As for not supporting discipline, you know perfectly well that that isn't why I'm annoyed.

'If you wish me to be plainer, say so. If you have a brain in your head, you will know what I mean without forcing me to be plainer. Good night, Inspector! Take your men with you, and close the door behind you!'

Hasling folk are traditionally inquisitive; and what their sharp noses pry out they are most eager to share with their neighbours. Hasling stayed up late that night, passing on the details of the memorable scene in the church; and the Hasling public-houses, from *The Dunmow Flitch*, at the east end of the straggling main street, to *The Periwinkle and Pipe*, at the west end, had not done such a trade since the night of the Coronation.

But, together with their sometimes desperate eagerness to pass on news to friends and neighbours, goes—with Hasling folk—an opposite and complementary dislike of telling a stranger even the time of day. It is this dislike of telling 'home' news to the 'foreigner' which explains how it was that the business of Mrs. Hammond's memorial tablet was to remain a purely Hasling matter for some days after the Inspector had taken the tablet down from Hasling Church.

Hasling, again, having no newspaper of its own—the village's existence was acknowledged by both the Rowcester and the Staintree papers, which gave a weekly column to Hasling; but no reporter was permanently stationed in Hasling

—tended never to see any Hasling happening in terms of 'news'.

'And after all,' said the editor of a national daily some months later, 'what *is* news, when you get down to it? The more I deal in it, the less I seem to know what it is I'm dealing in. And yet, I'll go this far: whatever news *is*, it isn't events—it's people. Personalities. It wouldn't even be news if a man bit an alligator, let alone a dog. It's got to be a man of a special sort to bite that alligator (or that dog) before I can see that *as* news. And then, damn me if the chap just doesn't turn out to be the sort of bloke that makes you say, "Well, dammit! this personality 'd be news if all that happened was the dog bit him." Whatever some people do is news; and there's another sort of people could be crowned Emperor of China after having been reprieved for murder, and I'd just spike the story. How d'you explain that, Charlie?'

'I don't,' said the News Editor. 'I tried to, long ago. I gave it up. It was making my head hurt. But I suppose you're thinking of the Bishop of Rowcester. . . .'

'Right in one, me lucky lad! The Bishop of Rowcester, Gawd bless him! Now, wha's he got that I haven't got? Tell me that?'

'Easy. A mitre, a crozier, a bee in his bonnet, and enough gall to get him a job as star newspaper reporter. Any other questions?'

'All right then: tell me this. Why is he news?'

'Easy. Because we make him news. We mention him. We write him up.'

The Editor smiled the smile of superior experience.

'Don't you believe it, Charlie! Why, good lord, look at the misfires *you* know about! Orders from On Top. Plug this man; plug that woman. Make 'em news. So what? Can we? You know we can't.'

'Well, then, let's say we've—somehow—picked the Bish out, and that he's made the grade. I dunno. What's your answer? He wouldn't be news very long if we decided one day to ignore his very existence.'

'Ah, Charlie, but that's just the point. I've got a sort of mystical philosophy about all this. . . .'

'Oh, yeah?'

'Oh, yeah! I think there's a certain type of human being who not only will not be ignored; he can't be ignored. You get it in every class of society, in every age-group. You know the kid at school that all the others talk about? You know the suburban

housewife that all the other women rush to the back-garden fences to discuss behind her back. That woman can do anything—or nothing. It makes no difference. She was born to be talked about: and that's all there is to it.'

'Um. And the Bishop is one of those pre-ordained These Names Make News?'

'Yes. Look: if I was to ask you—snap! like that—what was the most striking characteristic of the Bishop, what would you say? Never mind thinking. Quick now! What's the most striking thing about him? Well . . . put it another way: what do you think of immediately when I suddenly say, "Bishop of Rowcester"?''

'Pacifism?'

The Editor smiled, rubbing his chubby hands together until they hissed like sandpaper.

'Ah-ha! Pacifism, eh?'

'Well, we've plugged it enough,' said the News Editor cynically. 'He ought to have got the label stuck to him by now.'

'Tell me, Charlie: I bet you haven't thought about *this* one before.'

'Well, I'll buy it.'

The Editor fixed his eyes—they were very pale blue, so that the pupil seemed startlingly black—upon his News Editor. It was obvious that the Editor was riding a hobby. The News Editor prudently composed himself to listen.

'It's this. We never think. . . . That's the trouble.'

'We've got too much to do, getting out the paper.'

'This is serious, Charlie. Don't b—— about.'

'Sorry! What were you going to say?'

'Only this. The Bishop is News. Okay? Whether or not we've made him news, doesn't matter a tinker's cuss at the moment. But let's accept that he's news. Agreed?'

'If you say so.'

'Okay, then. When I ask you what's the dominant idea—the *theme*, if you like—of all the news the Bish boils down to, you say—rightly—"pacifism". Right? Okay. Well then . . .

'Now, Charlie . . . *why*? Yes, that's what I said. *Why*?'

'W—Why? Why what? I don't get you, Tom. . . .'

'Why the pacifism, Charlie?'

'Well . . . Well, I suppose he believes in it. Or . . . or something. I dunno. Sorry. I can't see what you're getting at, Tom. What's on your mind?'

'Well then . . . why news? Why is he news? Okay. Skip it.'

You've had a whack at answering that.' The Editor sighed. At guessing games, Tom wasn't so hot. 'I see I shall have to explain myself more fully,' he sighed again.

'You're damn right you will,' said Tom, with a sort of cheerful truculence. 'You're talking double-dutch, 's far as I'm concerned.' He seemed to take some pride in his density; and the Editor suddenly roared:

'All right, you fathead! Why is it news—if you must have it in' words of one syllable—why is it news for a *bishop*—got it: a BISHOP?—to be a pacifist?'

'I dunno . . . I . . . Oh, crikey! Yes . . . By God!'

'Well I'm glad the penny's dropped at last,' said the Editor sourly. 'I must say, it's taken its time about it. So you do, *at last*, see what I'm driving at?'

'Well, yes, of course I do. You mean: what *should* be news should be a bish who likes war, who unveils war memorials, who attends church parades, and opens Territorial drill-halls, and christens battleships, and names his kids "Montgomery", "Napoleon" and "Kubla Khan"?'

'Jenghiz Khan. Yes, that's right. Pacifism is what we ought to expect from a *bi.hop*. It shouldn't *be* news that a bishop's a pacifist. So what's the—I mean: *where's* the—news value in the Bishop of Rowcester's being a pacifist?'

'Pretty well unique. The one bish who lives up to the Gospel,' said the News Editor comfortably. 'More pacifism among the bishops, and he'd be cold. That's your answer. . . .'

'Is it? I'm not so sure. . . .'

But that conversation was to take place after, and not before, the Bishop had made himself News in a big way, in a matter connected with, but not altogether of the pure essence of, his pacifism.

For—as he was to say—his objection to Mrs. Hammond's memorial tablet was based as much on a desire to observe canons of good taste as on a desire to avoid the perpetuation of old hatreds.

The incident of the tablet's removal remained a matter for Hasling gossip only; it was not reported in any newspaper until after it had become but the first episode in what the newspapers were to call, with more brevity than accuracy, a saga.

And, indeed, when the news of the quarrel between the Rector of Hasling and his Bishop reached London, the news

was not only old, since the news had reached London by a most roundabout route; but the news value of the story was at first based rather on what the News Editor had been conditioned to think of anything reported of the Bishop than upon what was reported of others involved in the story.

The story, in fact, did not break until nearly a fortnight had passed since the evening of the tablet's removal; and in that fortnight the critic's indefatigable attention to his own interests had managed to achieve one of the very limited number of things which may make a name known to the whole public, instead of to even a large percentage of that public.

Phyllida got the first intimation that the critic had pulled off Something Really Big when the telephone rang at a little after eight o'clock on the morning after the tablet had been removed to Mr. Chrimes's house. She had awakened—or, rather, been awakened—to a sense not so much of foreboding as of guilt. The telephone, she realized, must have been ringing for a minute or more before she associated the noise which had awakened her with a need to take the hand microphone off its cradle. She put out a listless hand, suddenly remembering what Mr. Chrimes had had to say after he had called; remembering how she had cried herself to sleep; how the night had been troubled with dreams in which the dead had returned in monstrous and terrifying forms. . . .

'Yes?'

The critic's voice was bright with excitement.

'Mrs. Hammond? Oh . . . First of all: how *are* you?'

'Well . . . I'm feeling dreadful, really. But I don't suppose that interests you very much. . . .'

'Oh, but it *does*. I am so sorry. What is it? Flu?'

'I had some really rather awful news last night. It's upset me, rather. I . . . I'll tell you about it later. . . .'

'Well I *am* sorry. However . . . if it isn't *too* bad, perhaps you'll be glad to hear that *I* have some splendid news for *you*. And, perhaps if your news is really bad, my news may cheer you up.'

'It would have to be pretty good,' said Phyllida, forcing a smile into her voice.

The smile must have been detected, for the critic said, 'Ah, that's better! (By the way, it's a perfectly lovely day up here: I expect it is in the country, too.) Now, look: are you doing anything today? Well, look: it doesn't matter *what* you're doing. You've simply got to get up to London. . . .'

'Oh, but wait! I . . .'

'No. I'm not joking, dear lady. I am being as serious as I've ever been in my life. It's imperative—*imperative*, I tell you—that you get up to town today. It's . . . well . . . you'll see. . . .'

Phyllida asked, with a catch in her voice, 'Is . . . is it about Philip?'

There was a silence, during which Phyllida could almost hear the critic's discretion fighting his excitement; his secrecy warring against his gossipy desire to Tell All. He compromised: or, rather, declared an armistice between the opposing sentiments. He said, 'Well . . . yes. Yes, it is. . . .'

'In that case,' said Phyllida firmly, 'I don't want any more. I . . . I had some trouble connected with Philip last night. I . . . I can't tell you now, but . . . it was pretty awful. It's upset me more than I can say.'

The bright, chirpy excitement came back into the distant voice.

'Oh, but that's awful! But look: what *I've* got to tell you isn't awful at all. I do want to keep it a surprise, otherwise I'd tell you now, like a shot. But . . . it isn't awful at all; it's simply marvellous. . . .'

'Marvellous?'

'Marvellous. Wonderful. Quite the most super thing that I've ever pulled off; and, though I say it as shouldn't, I've not done too badly, have I? No, but seriously: this is really the best bit of news you'll have had in a *very* long time. When can you—what train can you catch? You couldn't have lunch with me, could you? (On me this time, of course.) Look: isn't there some train that gets in around twelve? You could catch that, and we could have an early lunch, and then I could . . . well, show you something. Please! I shall be heartbroken—positively heartbroken—if you don't come. . . .'

Phyllida cut across the pleading with a fairly curt, 'But I told you I *was* feeling awful. Couldn't you leave it over? Couldn't you make it another day? Can't you just *tell* me what it is that's so marvellous? Frankly, I just couldn't *face* the journey up. Not just at this moment.'

The critic permitted himself to sound annoyed.

'I don't say that it isn't—some of it—for my benefit; but I do think you might remember that I *am* doing something that helps *you* as well. No'—very petulantly now—'I can't tell you what it is. And, what's more, I *wouldn't*. I think it's very mean of you—very selfish—not to come up; because the whole

surprise depends on your being here. And tomorrow—or any other day—*won't* do. It's either today—lunch-time—or you can just wait and learn about it in due course. Frankly, I couldn't care less!

It took about ten more minutes of this sort of nagging—at which, it must be recorded, the critic was an expert—to break down Phyllida's obstinacy.

'Oh, very well. There's a train at ten-thirty-three, which gets me into Liverpool Street at ten to twelve. Where do you want me to come? I'm afraid I shall be very poor company; but you've only got yourself to blame.'

Chirpy again:

'Oh, bless you! You'll soon perk up the *moment* you see—well, what I'll have to show you. Yes, now . . . where shall I say? Oh . . . wait . . . Do you know the 'Hungarian Tulipan'? no! Oh . . . but that's the *place*. My dear, it's *heaven*! Beauchamp Place. (I forget the number, but it's at the top, just before you get to Walton Street. On the right-hand side, leaving the Old Brompton Road. You simply can't miss it. Tulipan. T-U-L-I-P-A-N.) We'll have paprika chicken. Well . . . I shall, anyway. Now do be a poppet, and be there in time. I loathe waiting, anyway; and I'm simply dying to see you and tell you all the news. And . . . well: just you get out of bed, like a good girl, and put on all your pretties. I do so love being seen with a well-dressed woman. Have you still got that Donegal with the bottle-green velvet collar you had on when we went to the "Maison Gasconne" the other day? Well, that's what you must wear. I *adored* that. I thought you looked the smartest woman there. Now, you won't be late, will you?'

Phyllida got up. She found, not altogether to her astonishment, that her feeling of depression—of guilt—had lightened somewhat. She found herself reflecting how *stable* the critic tempted one to think him, even if he wasn't. But, anyway, Phyllida was conscious of turning towards the thought of asking his advice as to something which might promise her a relief from bewilderment, anxiety, doubt and . . . something indefinable, but . . . worse.

She caught the train with only seconds to spare; for she had taken a lot of time and an unusual amount of care in making her toilet . . .

* * *

'We'll just walk down to the Old Brompton Road,' said the critic, as they left the 'Hungarian Tulipan'; 'there's more

chance of picking up a taxi there. Well: aren't you glad you came?"

'It's awfully rich,' said Phyllida.

'Yes . . . I know. But it's awfully *good*. I've told *dozens* of people about it; and they all *love* it. (Only people I like, of course; and if they dared to tell people they knew but I *didn't* about it, they know jolly well what I should have to say!) But it is rather fun, I think, don't you?"

'Once in a while, I think it's heaven!' said Phyllida, trying to match the prevalent conversational style. 'And now, what's this surprise you've got for me? I hope it's worth my getting up specially for you? It'll have to be something pretty *good*, I can tell you, if I'm going to forgive you for having made me rush for that train!'

The critic stepped out into the Old Brompton Road, waving his malacca cane.

'*Taxi-i-i!* (Oh, will they *never* wake up!) *Taxi-i-i-i!* (Oh, brav-oh! He really *heard*! How really *splendid*!)'

The taxi crossed the road diagonally, its driver ignoring the critic's signs that he should point his bonnet eastwards, rather than westwards.

'Stupid man!' he grumbled. 'Now he'll have to turn around all over again! Still, I expect it's just to get another *thruppence* marked up on the clock! They're not *really* as stupid as you think: most of their stupidity is just *greed*, my dear. (Don't I *know*!) Oh, well . . .'

The taxi drew up, and the critic opened the door for Phyllida. The driver said, 'Where to, sir?'

'Now, if you'd seen what I was trying to tell you,' the critic said, 'you wouldn't have had to turn round again. As it is . . . Oh, well: do you know the little private cinema—it's a trade-cinema, really—in Venus Street? That's off St. Giles's Circus. Do you?'

'No, sir: can't say as I do,' said the driver cheerfully. 'But I expect we'll find it.'

'You people never know a *thing*, nowadays,' said the critic, climbing, tut-tutting, into the cab. 'Well'—very ungraciously—'if you go to St. Giles's Circus, I'll tell you then.'

'A cinema, eh?'

'Yes. My dear, these taxi-drivers are quite hopeless. I'm getting so positively fed up with them, that I've a *good mind* to stop tipping them *altogether*. They expect their tip just the same, and the wretched passenger has pretty well to guide them to

their destination. They know nothing, and they don't want to learn. They are *the* most *awful* parasites I can think of! I wonder they don't ask the passengers to drive their horrid cabs for them, while they sit and smoke in the back. Oh, dear . . . all this bad temper is making me so hot. Shall we forget the taxi-driver? (He should wash his neck, by the way!) The world is so full of such wonderful things—not taxi-drivers—that we all should be something as happy as kings. You're going to have such a surprise! By the way, if it isn't a rude question: who *did* make that simply wonderful little number you're wearing? (Oh, don't mind: I'm always madly interested in my girl-friends' clothes. But do tell me! Who made it? It looks at least Hardy Amies or Lachasse. Do you care for Creed's things, by the way? Sometimes I *do*, and then again I *don't*. It's so confusing.) St. GILES's Circus. . . ! Not St. *George's* Circus! No . . . Oh, my *God*—where do you think you're going? Well, I'm in a hurry. What's the *good* of apologizing? Why don't you just *listen*, instead? Oh, well, get on with it, for goodness' sake! We're late enough, as it is!

He sat back, muttering, after having closed the sliding window with an angry abruptness. Phyllida found herself thinking that even men as masculine as Philip had been could behave in this childishly petulant way with taxi-drivers—especially stupid ones. Was it, she wondered, the effect of a woman's presence?

Did men—any sort of men—behave quite so immaturely when on their own?

Of course, Philip had to be either pretty tight or pretty down in the mouth to let his petulance get the better of his good manners; and again, at the worst, Philip could always have backed up his rudeness with a solid right to the jaw. (Yes: that had cost two pounds at Bow Street once. . . . Well, well!)

Had anyone ever slapped the critic's face?

Phyllida, watching the frowning face, thought, *I bet he would be just as arrogant if he got himself beaten up every day of his life.*

The critic, unaware that he was the subject of some fairly deep analysis, said, 'Yes . . . he is going the right way, *at last!* Good! Now we can relax. (Of course, we're not really late. I just said that. But *suppose we had been?* It would have been just the same.)

'Do you *like* the flicks? You do. With me . . . well . . . it's rather *like* Creed's clothes. Sometimes I just adore the cinema;

and then I don't go for *literally* months on end. Have you ever done any acting?

'Never. Well . . . only at school . . . We did *The Mikado* one end-of-term, and I was one of the three little maids who sang the song.'

'My dear, what *fun*! Adorable! Did you cork your own eyebrows? That's something I always *loved*. Corking my eyebrows.

'We did Gilbert and Sullivan, too. At my prep school, I mean. I went to the sort of public school which was too madly hearty even for *The Pirates of Penzance*. The headmaster used to insist that all the plays mustn't have women in them. None at all: not even one woman. Well . . . that's a very *tiresome* sort of rule for dramatic societies—even at school. I mean: it pretty well lets out everything, from *Romeo and Juliet* to *East Lynne* . . .'

Phyllida laughed.

'I should say so! But . . . well: what on earth did it leave *in*?'

'My dear, the most *curious* things! It was really rather fun . . . I mean: just *looking* for them was fun. We had to go back to the Gothick to find things. Sometimes there would be a woman in the play; but so unnecessarily so, that we could cut her out without harming the plot. (Actually, in most cases, it *improved* it: no one bothered to represent Woman in art until Thackeray did Becky Sharp. The Gothick is *hopeless* with Woman.)

'Now, let me see: what did we do? Oh, dear . . . it's so long ago.

'I remember, though, we had a crack at something of Horace Walpole's. No, it wasn't *The Castle of Otranto*, but something called Somebody-or-other's Mother. Something like that. It's curious, but I know it was called something like that. But—I can see that's what's struck you!—how on *earth* you can have a play about somebody's mother without a woman in it, beats me! The headmaster, though, was *superbly* indifferent to difficulties. I've heard since that he wasn't considered very favourably as a scholar—I mean, by people who ought to have known. But he was a wonderful *example*. He never taught anything—I mean: when he had been a form-master. But I don't suppose there was a boy who was at Radton in my time who wasn't positively inspired by just seeing how little he cared about anything. Anything difficult, I mean.

'After all. (Oh, thank goodness! This fearful man has actually found the right address. At least, we've got to St. Giles's

Circus. Driver: NOW we go down Venus Street . . . It's over there. . . .)

'Oh, yus, I know where Venus Street is. What number was you looking for?'

'You didn't seem to know it a few *minutes* ago! And the number that I want is seventy-two. And *you* are the person to look for it, not me. Seventy-two, please!

'These drivers! And always striking for more money! What a world! Now . . . where was I? Ah, yes! Headmaster. Radton. Um. Ummm . . .'

'Difficulties . . .'

'Goodness, yes! That's right. Yes . . . Difficulties. What a really wonderful man he was! Like Dr. Arnold, you know: terribly stupid, madly prejudiced, *hideously* severe . . . and so unshakably consistent. I do think that's so important, don't you?'

'Yes,' said Phyllida slowly. 'I do.'

'You could count on him to do the same thing, right or wrong. Always. Except—I don't know—that, where there's absolute consistency, you don't seem to see actions as right or wrong. That, I feel, is what attracts—fascinates—demoralizes—in such people as Attila, Jenghiz Khan, Napoleon, Lenin, Hitler, and that sort. And why Mussolini failed in the end: because he showed inconsistency. That, of course, took the scales off men's eyes, and started them to thinking. Oh, here we are! What fun it is to be able to talk seriously just once in a while. . . .

'There! Do you see? They always keep the motor running just that little bit more, so that there's a chance of their putting another sixpence on the clock.' He opened the door, and assisted Phyllida to alight. 'Well, driver: how much? Good heavens!

'Do you know that you don't deserve a *penny* tip? No . . . it's no good your grinning like that. I really mean it. However . . . since I'm in the most divinely forgiving mood, you may take a shilling for yourself, and don't ask me if I've anything smaller than a pound note. I haven't.'

'You're lucky!' said the driver, grinning, as he prepared to take off all his six greatcoats. 'I suppose you didn't know there was *another* St. Giles's Circus, dahn be the Elephant. A shilling, you said? Much obliged.'

'I didn't know! And, what's more, I don't care. I advise you to read the London Street Guide before I hail you again.'

The critic took Phyllida's arm in a friendly, proprietary sort of way.

'My dear . . . here we are. Mind the step! This really is a surprise for you. You see. . . !'

The cinema was a small room, some twenty-five feet in length by eighteen feet in breadth. It was windowless, seemingly airless, and was thick with cigarette-smoke and the muffled booming whispers of fifty people packed too tightly together. The carpet was a grey Wilton, and the matt paint of the walls matched the colour of the close-fitted carpet. At one end of the room, sixty tub-chairs, grossly overstuffed, and upholstered in grey Bedford cord, were arranged in arcs—each arc being of ten chairs—and all were facing the screen at the room's other end; the screen being hidden now behind heavy grey velvet drapes.

The lighting was as dim as it was diffused. A coppery, sullen radiance ran sluggishly upwards from half-saucers of lacquered bronze, fixed to the wall at shoulder-height. The light, though, mucky-speckled as it was, seemed to show up the dinginess of the furnishings, rather than the cleanliness of anything which might have been clean. Linen looked grey as the drapes—and as dusty. Suits looked the shabbier because of the dense shadows that the dim light made in their folds. Shoes did not shine, but noses did. There was a halfness about everything; about the light, about the smartness of the men and the chic of the women; about the accuracy of the grammar and the 'standard' of the pronunciation. The people seemed to belong, no less than the furnishings, to a world of shadow.

Had Phyllida ever been to a private film-showing she would have known that the gathering was strictly representative of that section of the cinema industry which, when all the producers, the script men, the actors, the cameramen, the cutters, and the editors have done their work, gets the film on to the world's screens.

Everyone was drinking; and, as a man silently advanced, to inspect the critic and his lady-friend, the critic said:

'I must introduce you, Freddy, in half a jiff. But—first and foremost—a drink for both of us! We've had *quite* the most exhausting journey to get here you could imagine. . . !'

The man—'Mr. Harmer—Freddy—Mrs. Hammond; Mrs. Hammond—Mr. Harmer—Freddy—now you both know each

other!"—was of medium height, with dark hair now very thin on top; a thin, elaborately curved mouth, and sad brown eyes. He stooped a little, and his jacket, for that reason, dipped in the front. Phyllida guessed his age as a rather badly worn forty-five; but thought she might have to revise her estimate—either way—in the daylight.

Freddy said, 'Let me get the drinks.' He led the way slowly to a cloth-covered trestle-table, loaded with bottles, behind which a waiter in a white coat was standing. 'What would you like, Mrs. Hammond?'

'I . . . I don't really think I want one . . . I . . .'

'Of course she does,' the critic said, briskly. 'You'd better have a brandy-and-soda, since it's now after our lunch. Or a straight brandy. We've got straight brandy, haven't we?'

'Yes,' said Freddy. 'A brandy, Mrs. Hammond?'

'All right,' said Phyllida.

'And I'll have a *large* gin, with just a very little tonic. I'm rather off strong drink at the moment. I've got my article to do for the *Clarion*; and heaven knows I've got to be able to think!

'When's the showing coming off, Freddy?'

Freddy looked at his wrist-watch, and confirmed what he saw by a glance at the bronze-dialled clock high on the wall.

'Any moment now.' He looked around. The audience were all standing, though there were sixty seats; and, with glasses in their hands, they had split into small groups, of not more than three or four persons. All seemed to be having, not conversations, but the sort of arguments that business associates must have in order to arrive at an agreed policy. 'Yes, yes . . . I see . . . Of course. . . Well now; it's like this . . . D'you think you could . . . Next Thursday, then. . . Well, then, I'll see to it. . . Will you arrange the . . . If you could do that, Freddy could . . . I think *you'd* better handle that end, while I . . .'

'Who are these people, please?' Phyllida asked.

The critic looked at Freddy, and Freddy returned the look.

'You . . .' said the critic; 'you know more than I do.'

'Oh, I was only . . .'

'No, Mrs. Hammond: not a bit. This is a press show; but for the trade only. There aren't any—well, except one or two, like yourself—who aren't connected with the trade press. Would you like to meet one or two? I'll introduce you with pleasure.'

'After,' said the critic. 'We've just about time for another before you start, eh?'

'Just about,' said Freddy, glancing at his watch and at the clock on the wall. 'Have to make them quick, though,' he said apologetically.

Phyllida said, 'That's important—the trade press?'

'Oh . . . very. The trade critics influence the booking to an enormous extent. Put it this way: the critics of the big national dailies and Sundays get the people interested in the films which are going to be shown—which have been already booked. They tell the public to go and see a film which has already been chosen by a circuit. Okay. But these people here—he swung his hand around in a comprehensive gesture—'are responsible for the booking in the first place. If they praise a film, well and good; if they pan it, it's damned before it has a chance. But they're fair . . . fair. I'll give 'em that.'

The critic handed another brandy to Phyllida, who began to say, 'Oh, I really didn't want another,' and thought better of it.

He said, 'Freddy understates the case. Without the approval of these people—or people like them—the cinema industry would either have to pack up, or they'd have to find some way of corrupting the critics. They haven't done that yet, Freddy, have they? Freddy thinks that isn't such a good idea,' he said to Phyllida.

'Oh . . . why?' She asked, smiling: 'Because the bribe might be enormous . . . and enormously tempting?'

The critic said, 'He'd have to be in favour of bribing anyway; wouldn't you, Freddy?'

'I don't see why films shouldn't be judged on their merit. . . .'

'Isn't that what you're rather scared of?' the critic said maliciously.

Freddy flushed, and Phyllida said, 'I don't quite get the drift of this argument. But don't worry, Mr. Hammer, he's only pulling your leg.'

'Oh, I know that,' said Freddy, still flushing.

'Well, then: I shouldn't worry, if I were you. By the way, which of the trade-papers do you represent?'

Freddy looked blankly at Phyllida for a moment. He said, 'I . . .'

But it was the critic who said, 'Bless you! Freddy doesn't represent the critics. He represents the victims. Freddy produced this film you're going to see!'

'Really! Did you really and truly produce a film?'

'Yes . . . I'm afraid so.'

'Well . . . Do you know, you're the first film-producer I've ever met?'

'And he doesn't look a bit like you'd imagined they'd look, eh?'

'Well, no. Not really. And you're English, aren't you?'

'Yes. Yes, I am.'

'Freddy's also in quite a small way at the moment. That's inclined to hold up the inevitable typing. But it'll come; you see; it'll come . . . Freddy with a big paunch, and cigars, and a fake American accent, and a suite at the Savoy.'

'God forbid,' said Freddy. He glanced at his wrist-watch yet again. 'Look, chaps, I do really think we ought to start.' In a louder voice: 'Will all of you take your places, please? Take your drinks with you. And you can all smoke.'

'*Drinks . . .*' whispered the critic into Freddy's ear.

'*What?*'

'*Drinks. Fill 'em up . . .*'

'*Oh, yes . . . of course.* By the way, everybody: don't forget to fill up, and take a full drink with you. The bar will close down for the period of the showing; and'—a little laugh—'it's quite a longish film.'

Everyone but Freddy and some technicians who had gathered around him went to the seats. The air was blue with tobacco-smoke; and as the dim wall-lights went off, and the drapes opened with a rattle and jerk, the smoke showed sinuous, wavering smudges of black against the dazzling whiteness of the bare screen.

The conversations continued; the small groups preserving their identity, even though their members were sitting, rather than standing.

'Freddy's quite *good*,' the critic said. 'If he makes a go of this, he's going to be *very* good. Trouble is, he's been working on a shoestring, so far. Capital: that's what he's been short of. But—here: whisper. *That fat man in the first row. Yes? Well . . . that's* Das Kapital. (We hope!) It's rather fun this, isn't it? Aren't you glad you came?'

'Of course I am. But what are we seeing?'

'Well . . . now that we're here. (I mean: now that I've managed to *get* you here.) Now that you *are* here, I don't see why you shouldn't know. It's quite Freddy's best. At least: that's what he *says*. But it ought to be pretty good. I mean: he *is* good, I don't care what people say. And . . . well: we've put something into the film which wasn't in the script.'

'You have?'

'Yes. I heard Freddy was nearly through with this film; and I went to see him. Fortunately, everyone was still on the set; and it wasn't difficult to shoot the small scene that I've brought you here for. When we've seen it, we can go, if you like. That is, unless you'd rather stay. . . .'

'I'll wait and see what the film's like,' said Phyllida prudently. 'But you're making me terribly curious. Terribly excited, really. And it's about Philip?'

'Well . . . sort of. Anyhow'—with a paternal tap on the back of her hand—'you'll see in a minute.'

The white light pouring from the projection-room shut off for a moment; then went on again. Blinked once or twice, and then blacked out.

The whirring noise continued in the total darkness. Then the screen bore the legend, in bold white letters on a dark sepia ground:

A DIOMEDE FILM

Music, clangorous yet soft, harsh with tinny discords and full of strange keening whistles, began to be played by an orchestra obviously trained to bring out the quality of the most modern in cinematic musical composition. Yet the music, harsh though it was, and—at first hearing—so singularly unmelodious, conveyed its meaning with uncompromising clarity. As there are musical modes fitted to express tender emotions, this mode, so crude-seeming, well expressed the mood of defiant despair which it is the modern fashion to see as the sole stimulus of human achievement. There was no love in the music, no hope, and such tenderness as—for a few seconds, and at rare intervals—seemed rather to be hinted at than expressed—was no more than the tenderness of self-pity; that nobler self-disgust and hatred of fate thrust angrily and contemptuously away.

The screen began to reel off the credit titles: names in which Phyllida could have no interest, since they all were unfamiliar to her. Maurice Leigh Upton . . . Rom Goldblattner . . . Sol Uchchinskiy . . . Peter Razmuzov . . . Tamara Levy . . . Tom Bertram . . . Sarita von Ahrnstein. Then the players. . . . The music continued its keening.

And then . . .

'Yes . . . ' said the critic, nudging her.

Phyllida suddenly wanted to run out of the small, dark room.

She felt sick.

The screen was saying:

THE POEM 'THE FUNERAL PYRE'
IS BY THE LATE
SQDN.-LDR. PHILIP HAMMOND,
D.S.O., D.F.C.

'I . . . would you mind if I went?' Phyllida managed to whisper.

'You stay here,' said the critic, all the preciosity, all the epicene affectation, leaving his voice. He sounded, in that moment, as manly as kind. He pressed her arm above the elbow, giving a reassuring squeeze.

'You'll feel all right. Nobody,' he said, with the percipience of his type, 'knows that it's anything to do with you. Not even Freddy. . . .'

Why, she wondered, did that make her feel better? But it had made her feel better. And how had the critic known how to put his finger right on the cause of her alarm? But he had known. . . .

The screen said:

PRODUCTION
FREDERIC ST. BARBE HARMER

The saxophones wailed plangently at this . . .

Then the music changed. Phyllida recognized Schumann's Symphony No. 2 in C. Smoky clouds swirled over the screen, to give the spectator the impression that he was flying through the air at some unimaginable height. But the clouds melted before the first stirrings of vertigo could lead to nausea. The screen became a uniform whitish-grey as the clouds halted in their headlong rush, and blurred as the camera went out of focus. Letters appeared on the grey:

WINGS OF THE NIGHT

It was a story of the R.A.F. . . .

* * *

Phyllida, watching familiar shot follow familiar shot—the panning shot of the airfield, taken from boot-level; the shot of the Ops Room, with successive momentary close-ups of heroes and heroines—their upper lips stiffened with Max Factor; the shots of the interior of the control-tower; the shot of the

parallel lines of fog-flares; the shots of Berlin, looking like a badly printed map seen by a man reeling with drink—understood what the critic had meant when he complained that Freddy Harmer had had to make the picture on a shoestring.

Out of a library, Phyllida reflected, would have been the more appropriate term . . .

Something of her nervousness fading with the assurance that no one there (save the critic) knew of her personal interest in the poem which was to be read—as the critic had whispered—in the dubbed voice of—guess?—*Rodney Hawkins*, Phyllida began to know a fresh cause for nervousness; anxiety. She began to fear that this scissors-and-paste stuff, this press-cutting record of the beautifully photographed and not-quite-so-beautifully photographed familiar would go from its uninspired beginning to its inevitable end without the least distinctive, the least imaginative touch, to lift the film out of the all-too-common rut. She rather liked Freddy Harmer: he looked worried, poor chap! She liked his softness, his shyness, that self-effacing quality in him which made even the moderate success that he had enjoyed seem so much more striking than the fuller success enjoyed by the critic.

His brown eyes looked insecure, hunted; and suddenly Phyllida found herself wishing—passionately wishing; wishing to the point of stifled heart and wet eyes; that Freddy Harmer could pull it off. That—somewhere, anywhere—the progress of this mediocre, dull bit of reportage could be lifted out of the ordinary; could catch the critics' eyes; could jerk them out of their somnolent half-attentiveness. That twist—yes, that was the word: *twist*—that she wanted could still save the film. Even were the twist to come three-quarters of the way through, it would save the film. It would excuse the dull beginning; make the dullness seem purposive—a foil for the gem which was the twist. Freddy could talk of his art—and no one could contradict him. Even were the twist to come almost at the end, it would be sufficient. But—oh, let it be soon! How tired even she was—she, who so rarely went to the pictures—of the Spitfires standing in ranks on the tarmac; everything white in the dawn sun; with the long, long shadows thinning out from undercarriages and the feet of waiting men. . . . And, if she was tired of the same old shots; their very technical perfection had impressed them so forcibly on the attention and the memory; then how much more bored must be these case-hardened critics, who came here week after week, year after

year; by duty, rather than by choice. And, after a few times, by habit almost, rather than by the least burdensome compulsion.

The tall, nearly middle-aged woman, for instance. The one in the long coat hanging from rounded shoulders, with a piece of limp beaver at the collar. The one who thought that the contrast of a Gay Little Hat with tired, plain coat and tired, plain face enlivened face and coat without robbing the Hat of its lively effect. The one in the front row, on the left, talking to the man to whom she had been talking when Phyllida had arrived in the cinema.

She was still talking; she had been talking—the silhouetting of her head against the screen had made that apparent—all through the film. The silhouetted face of the man to whom she had been—was now—talking showed that he was endeavouring to take some interest in the film. At least, he was looking straight ahead, as the woman talked.

The *suddenly* realized need to see Freddy Harmer pull a rabbit out of the bag had given Phyllida as *sudden* an interest in the audience. The men and women grouped in front of the small screen had *suddenly* become, for her, not so much the symbol of Freddy's failure, as the detector by which the presence of the hoped-for success would be registered. She began, without taking her eyes from the screen for more than a second or two at a time, to study the audience—the picture was generally brightly lit, and the audience was clear to see. With dull heart of stone, Phyllida saw the attitudes, heard the sounds, of inattention.

The murmur of not-quite-even-whispered conversations rose above the screen-noises, the speech of the actors. Phyllida watching, listening, knew that the boredom induced by the film's unredeemed ordinairiness had now reached a point at which the audience were making no efforts to deny it. And—but this was the worst thing!—Phyllida could not find it in her to condemn them. They were no casual guests, bound by the common rules of politeness to affect an interest that they did not, could not, feel. They were, by prescriptive right, as much a part of the show as the actors; as much a part of the film as the producer. In a way, Phyllida thought, they are right to be so honest—so uncompromisingly, so cruelly honest—about their opinion, even though they choose to express that opinion in action rather than in word.

And then, as though in answer to prayer, the hoped-for

change came. It came so suddenly that it needed the nudge so plainly given to the woman with the Hat to catch her attention; to bring back her attention to the screen; to catch and hold that attention; and to wipe away, in one thrilling moment, the soporific boredom which had caught her in its hold.

In what the magic of that moment quite consisted, no one—not even Phyllida—could have said. The over-smart Waaf, who was handing the briefing-papers to the romantically accoutred young pilot said nothing. But that was in the plot. She was registering the stiff upper lip. And so was he.

They were not so much in love with each other as in that state in which their mutual love seems a possible, if not quite an inevitable, thing. Had he put out his hand, and pressed hers; had she suddenly put up her mouth to be kissed; no one watching would have felt the least surprise. Happy ending. . . . Well: after the pedestrian necessity of Just One More Sortie had been got through . . .

But the element of surprise was there, all right.

For neither spoke. The young man, hitching up his parachute harness, casually put out a hand, and as casually accepted the papers which were as casually given. The girl seemed, for one second, about to speak; then decided against it; and turned away from the man, to look at a map on the wall. The man, still apparently more occupied with the nice adjustment of his harness than with the girl's feelings, thrust the papers under his arm.

He watched her back, and the camera, scanning his face, left the audience in doubt. What was he thinking? Did he love her? Was he about to declare his love for her? Was he deciding that it would be better to leave the declaration of love, with its inevitable 'arrangements', until after he had returned from this last sortie of his tour of duty? It was not easy to say; the set face, the shadowed, inward-searching eyes, revealed nothing. What was he thinking?

And then the voice of Rodney Hawkins told them. . . . The most beautiful voice, they said, in the world.

The players were still; the girl looking at the map; the man looking at the girl's back. What the audience were hearing was the thought in the man's mind; the thought which was to make clear the hints of the set face; to resolve the riddle of the inward-searching eyes. . . .

The voice seemed to be at once within the inner ear, and as coming from an immense distance. Its delivery had the quality

of that still inner voice; and yet its clarity, not less than its gravity, gave it something of the passionless truth of the divine.

A cold hand clutched Phyllida's heart. Before the voice had spoken, she had been waiting for it—had been tensed up to await it. Now that it came, she felt an excitement, a thrilling upsurge of the heart which was dragging her to the very verge of hysteria. Suddenly she put out her hand, and clutched the critic's arm. His hand came lightly to rest on hers. He patted it in a gesture so pleasingly free from affectation or artifice that she felt the last tenuous threads of her self-control melt, break, snap, fall away. The burning tears, salt, heavy, oily with the shuddering relief of submission to the demanding heart, fell down her cheeks.

The clear, warm, passionless voice said:

'No salt-encrusted wood from the wine-dark sea
Shall kindle *my* funeral-pyre;
But the last few ounces of high-octane spirit
Shall burst, shall flame, shall spire
In a plume of rose-shot grey to the groined arch of the infinite:
Such a smoke as ascended not even from the poet Shelley's
burning,
When the shepherds on the Ligurian hills, turning
Aside from their labour a minute,
Saw the smoke afar-off, and wondered what burnt on the sea?
Different *my* poet's flame: when my crate crashes earth with
me in it:
Men, watching the smoke, will know what has happened
to *me*. . . .'

The Waaf said, without turning:

'Isn't it about time you thought about getting away?'

So, after all, it had happened. There was no more talking; for there was no more boredom. The ordinariness of the preliminary scenes was now revealed as an artistic trick to lead up to the climax of the moment when the secret heart of the plain young man was to be exposed in a poet's cry. The plainness—until one had been admitted into the secret—almost the dreariness, of the players, and of the players' background, was now seen as the symbol of inarticulacy; of the emotions which have no power to express themselves, save by a miracle wrought out of the unique, the irrecoverable

moment. And articulacy itself was now seen as a symbol of patience, of duty, of a submission to the cruel demands of uncomprehended life; but a submission which had nothing of shame in it. In this submission there was dignity as well as consistency. It was a submission which ennobled even the demands to which submission was being made.

The tears were not only for Philip; but the tears were for him, none the less.

He could never have done this for himself, Phyllida thought; it could never have happened to him. By his own effort. It had to be a few seconds' work on the telephone for . . . this on my right.

The film blacked on a servile acknowledgement to all sorts of unimportant persons and corporations, for their 'courtesy and kind co-operation'. The lights did not immediately go up.

There was no clapping.

'But I've just thought of something,' the critic whispered, the triumphant self-satisfaction sharpening his voice. 'We'll have a word with Freddy *immediately*. We'll grab him before anybody else can. My lord! what an inspiration. . . . *What an inspiration. . . !*'

But Phyllida knew that the critic was not referring to the poem: only to the judicious use that someone—not the writer—had made of the poem.

I mustn't let him anger me! she thought. It astonished her to know that she was beginning to nurse a bitterness against the critic because he had waited so long; because he hadn't stirred himself to 'make' Philip when Philip was still alive; when Philip could have enjoyed his success. *How he needed it. . . .*

The lights went on; the dusty, coppery radiance flowed up the dusty walls; and the pensive faces were seen. The woman with the Hat was putting a crumpled handkerchief away in a crocodile-skin bag.

The critic slid out of his seat, and slid into the empty seat at Freddy's side—in the front row. Phyllida saw the eager imparting of the 'wonderful idea'; and she saw, with no feelings of astonishment, Freddy's unemotional but obviously complete agreement, expressed in an over-deliberate, over-slow, nod of the head.

The critic rose, taking Freddy's arm; and beckoned to Phyllida to join them at the bar.

As she came up, the critic said, 'Do you know, Freddy didn't realize *who* you were?'

'No . . . No, I didn't . . . ' said Freddy staring at her, with his

eyes a little too speculative for the acknowledgements of ordinary casual social contacts. 'I . . . didn't realize you were *Philip's* wife.'

'Well,' said Phyllida, with a laugh whose nervousness she failed to hide, 'that's who I am.'

'Let me get you a drink,' said Freddy. 'As before?'

'I think I will try a brandy—a *small* one—this time,' said the critic. As Freddy turned to speak to the barman: 'Well . . . shall I tell Mrs. Hammond about our *new* idea?' To Phyllida: 'It really is the *tops*! We want Eileen Joyce to—well, *she* needn't actually *play* it—but she'd be playing it on a *record*—we want, just before Rodney starts to recite the poem, that slow movement from the Rachmaninoff No. 2. Played very, *very* softly. *Molto pianissimo, con emozione*. Oh, but so softly, it'll be no more than the sighing echo of a sigh. . . .

'Eh, Freddy?'

Freddy put the drinks into their hands. He raised his own glass in a perfunctory salute. He said, 'The Rachmaninoff No. 2? Why that? Any particular reason?'

'Well'—defensively—'what's wrong with it?'

'Nothing. It was used in *Brief Encounter*, that's all. In fact, that's what *made* the No. 2 Piano Concerto, just as that other film—the one with Anton Walbrook (you know the one I mean?)—made the Addinsell concerto. Have you any particular *feeling* for the Rachmaninoff? Why not the No. 3, if it comes to that? The public haven't heard that quite so often—or so much.'

'Now, *look*,' said the critic, in that sort of voice: 'it's just *because* it's been heard so *often*—and, as you say, so *much*—that people do know it. Of course they do. They *ought* to, by now. But . . . haven't you heard of the conditioned reflex, Freddy?'

'You know: ring a bell every time you give a dog a plate of bones, and his mouth, after a time, will water when he hears the bell—even though you don't give him the plate of meat? The public are like that. *Come to the Cookhouse Door, Boys—tum-tee-tee-tum-tum-tum*'—he carolled the tune lightly—'is a perfect example. Everybody knows what *that* means. And everybody *by now*—knows, when they hear the second Rachmaninoff, that deep, plangent emotion is in order. . . . Do you see what I'm driving at?'

Freddy coughed, and glanced apologetically at Phyllida.

'Yes . . . I see what you're driving at, all right.'

'Well, you needn't *laugh*. I'm *deadly* serious.'

'I wasn't exactly *laughing*. I was thinking that this must sound a little—well, cold-blooded—to Mrs. Hammond.'

'Oh . . .' said Phyllida, with a shrug.

'The Romans,' said Freddy, with a smile, 'used to put their tears in a bottle. You, old man, make it sound as though that's where we get them from. . . .'

The critic turned impulsively to Phyllida.

'Oh, he's impossible, Mrs. Hammond! Of course, everything—when you get back-stage—is a matter of dull, dreary *planning*. I know that. But there's nothing *wrong* with emotion that you plan to arouse. The emotion's genuine enough, even though you may go to tricks to arouse it. Look, Freddy: you seemed to *like* the idea just now. . . .'

'I liked the idea of some music,' said Freddy, signing to the bar-tender to replenish the glasses. 'Oh . . .' The woman with the Hat came across, her long coat trailing like a mantle from her forward-bent shoulders. 'Oh . . . hallo! Can I get you a drink?'

The Hat said, putting a bony hand on Freddy's forearm:

'Freddy: It Has Everything. But *Everything*. I don't mind telling you I *wept*.'

'Oh, I'm so glad. . . . By the way: I don't think you know Mrs. Hammond? Mrs. Archer, of *Cinematopical*? Well, Mrs. Archer: what's the verdict?'

'My dear,' said The Hat, again laying a hand on Freddy's forearm; 'I *told* you . . . I *told* you. I just *wept*. It was—oh, well . . . By the way: *do* tell me! *Who* was the *voice*?'

'Rodney Hawkins.'

'Of course! I *knew* I knew that voice! Oh . . . *didn't* he read it beautifully? Didn't you think so, Mrs. Hammond? I'm *sure* you did.'

'Yes,' said Phyllida; 'it was beautifully done.'

Mrs. Archer said to the critic, 'I don't know what *you* think, but I was just wondering if—oh, well, I don't suppose you can, really; but if you could—well: if it mightn't be just that little bit better to have some very soft . . .'

'*Music!*' the critic shouted. He caught one of Mrs. Archer's hands, and conveyed it to his lips. The noise of the kiss was loud. 'You *angel*! That's just what we were talking about when you came over!'

Mrs. Archer blinked and blushed.

'Oh, really?' she said in a gratified tone. 'Well . . . that's what I rather think. Don't you, Freddy?'

'Yes, I do. I'd already said so.'

'I rather think you *should*.'

'Well, yes. I'm going to.'

'If it isn't too late?'

'No. I'm going to. Definitely.'

'It would be rather nice. An improvement. Definitely.'

'Yes. I'm going to do it. What we were discussing wasn't that so much, as what the music should be. I couldn't quite *see* the second Rachmaninoff. I thought it—I don't know how you feel? Just the tiniest bit hackneyed? No?'

'Oh, no! Not a bit. *Dee-dee-dee; dee-dee-dee-dee-dee-dee*. . . . It's lovely. . . . If you could only get Eileen Joyce to play it. . . .'

'We could get permission to use a recording.'

'Or Moura Lympny. She's wonderful, too. . . .'

'Oh . . . I agree. Every time. Can I get you another drink, Mrs. Archer? No? I'm so very glad you liked the show.'

'Oh, I did. Every *moment* of it. You should make a *fortune*, Freddy. No, *seriously*. I'm going back to give you such a write-up, it'll turn your head, you lucky lad!'

'Thank you. Thank you very much.' There was no doubting Freddy's sincerity. Or wondering whether or not anything had depended upon the film's reception. . . .

'By the way, Freddy . . . I know I'm very ignorant. But . . . *who* wrote the poem?'

'Did you like it?'

'Well, *really*, Freddy! Would I *ask*?'

Freddy inclined his head very slightly in Phyllida's direction.

'Mrs. Hammond's husband. . . .'

The Hat looked startled for a long moment, during which a bony hand was pressed against the wide, sloppy mouth; Mrs. Archer looking not only startled but somewhat furtive as well, with only her eyes and her nose visible above the mask of her open hand. When—at last—she lowered her hand, she said, in a breathless, reverent sort of manner, 'Oh . . . *no*. . . !'

Phyllida looked to Freddy for guidance. Freddy said:

'Poems are written by someone, Mrs. Archer; and poets do have wives quite often. . . .'

'It was just the shock of coming face to face with it,' said Mrs. Archer vaguely. Then, to Phyllida: 'Oh, my dear . . . how *proud* you must be! How *very* proud. . . .'

'Yes . . . Yes, I am, I think,' said Phyllida, a little too conscious for comfort of the critic's watchful eyes.

'Is your husband here?' Mrs. Archer asked, peering into the smoky half-dark. 'I should so like to meet him. . . .'

'I'm afraid Philip . . . I . . . ' (*But how stupid! How odd!*)

'Oh, I am sorry, Mrs. Hammond. I . . . '

'It's all right.' Phyllida essayed a tearful smile. 'I . . . I thought I'd got used to it. . . .'

'A drink, I suggest,' said the critic, but not spitefully.

'Rodney Hawkins? Do you know him, Mrs. Hammond?' Mrs. Archer tentatively altered the trend of the conversation. 'I do think he has *the* most lovely voice. Did you know—oh, by the way,' she turned to Freddy, 'this will interest *you*. Did you know Rodney's booked to read some poems at the next Battle of Britain night, at the Albert Hall? You'll be going, won't you?'

'I expect so,' said Freddy. 'If I can get away.'

'If he can get away! Just listen to the hard-worked man! Of course you can get away. And I'll tell you why, Freddy: because I'd rather like to go, too.'

Phyllida said, 'Mr. Harmer: were you in the Raf, too?'

'Yes,' said Freddy, with a frown. 'Yes, I was.'

'Did you know my husband, by any chance?'

The frown deepened, and Phyllida had the impression that the man answered with some reluctance. But he did answer.

'Yes, I did.' He added, with very much the air of an afterthought: 'As a matter of fact, I knew him quite well. . . .'

'Oh . . . ' Phyllida was determined not to 'see' too much mystery. 'Were you in the same squadron at any time? Philip commanded 2000 Squadron.'

'I know,' Freddy said, with a glance at the door. 'He was my C.O. for a time. . . . Let me get you a drink?'

Freddy, shortly after that, had excused himself, on the grounds that 'I must see to my other guests, if you'll forgive me.' He had smiled, and shaken hands cordially enough; but he had left Phyllida with the impression that he was not sorry to have an undeniable excuse for breaking off the conversation.

I wonder why? Phyllida asked herself; and, vaguely troubled, not so much by a something reserved in Freddy's manner, as by the hint of mystery in that reserve, she asked the critic, on her way to Liverpool Street, whether or not there had ever been a quarrel between Philip and Freddy?

'I really couldn't tell you, my dear. As a matter of fact, I

didn't know, before today, that they *did* know each other. Was your husband his superior?"

'Yes. He commanded the squadron. What was Mr. Harmer's rank?"

'Wing-Commander. . . .'

'But . . . But . . . forgive me: but are you *sure*?"

'I suppose so. That's what he told me, anyway. Why? What's wrong with being a Wing-Commander?"

'Nothing. Except that it's not often anyone but a regular Air-Force man gets to a rank as high as that.'

'Oh . . . really? What was your husband? Not as high as that?"

'Only temporarily. Very temporarily. His substantive rank was Squadron-Leader. That's one below Wing-Commander. I don't know,' said Phyllida, eager to reject the least suspicion that she was suspicious of Freddy's claims; 'but I was just rather surprised that a volunteer had got so far in the Raf. They don't usually let them.'

The critic said, as though his mind were on other matters:

'Oh, I *see*. Yes, but Freddy wasn't a volunteer—a Territorial, or whatever they call them. He was a regular. He went to—is it Cranwell?"

'Yes. Cranwell.'

'Well. There. And he retired just before the war. Then, when the war came along, he joined up again. He had a pretty bad crash, and it did something to him—I don't know what. But whatever it was, he wasn't allowed to go on with whatever he was doing before. They didn't exactly kick him out; but they shifted him to the department (I don't know the exact terms; but you'll know what I'm talking about)—the department which deals with photographing things. Actually, he *had* been doing some film work—shorts for the Ministry of Education; things like that—between the time he retired and his joining up again; so it was probably that which gave them a chance to find something for him to do, to enable him to stay on in the Air Force. How did you feel about him? He's terribly shy, of course.'

'Oh . . . is *that* it?"

'Yes. Some people,' the critic added comfortably, 'think he's a crook. You know: because he seems so shifty at times. But he isn't a *bit*. Only shy. They say that he was cashiered; but I don't believe that. I mean: I don't see how he *could* have been.'

'Why 'couldn't he?'

'Oh . . . You think he probably was, then? How interesting!'

Phyllida said angrily, 'How dare you put things like that into my mouth! I said nothing of the sort. The next thing I shall know is that I'm cited in an action for slander!'

'I'm sorry. What *did* you say, then; if it wasn't that?'

'I merely said; I merely asked: what made you so certain he wasn't cashiered?'

'Oh, I see . . . Well: because he often has something to do with the organizing of R.A.F. do's. I don't imagine they'd let him help if he'd been cashiered, do you?'

'I don't imagine he'd be falling over himself to do the helping,' Phyllida said dryly. 'But . . . of course: the answer's no. In any case, why don't the people who say he's been cashiered just make certain, and look him up in the book?'

'Perhaps they have,' the critic murmured; but before Phyllida could voice her indignant protest: 'There, there: I was only joking. I'm sure there's nothing wrong with Freddy. It's only that look of his: as though he wonders if the bailiffs have actually got into the room, or whether they're merely waiting outside. . . .'

Phyllida had seen the look; so that she could do no more than to say:

'Well . . . if this film goes, he won't have so much to worry about, I take it?'

'No. He shouldn't. Though,' he added, with a smirk, 'if he thinks I'm finished with him yet, he's mistaken. The next thing, my girl, is to get Roddy Hawkins to read "The Funeral Pyre" at the Albert Hall. Then it *will* be known. Television, newsreels, next-morning's papers. I've only just *started* so far . . . You'll see. . . .'

Like many men who, by accident or design, have escaped Army service, the Bishop of Rowcester had something more than a mere respect for Discipline. That is to say, he expected his orders to be carried out promptly and without protest; while giving himself, in the interpretation of the rules laid down for episcopal conduct, a tender licence to behave pretty much as the spirit moved him; for His Lordship had gained some notoriety as a Quietist before coming to be known as a Pacifist.

But, when the News Editor had suggested to the Editor that

the Bishop's pacifism had made him News, that was only half the story—and two newspapermen of their experience should not have forgotten the important fact behind the story of the Bishop's pacifism: that the Bishop owed both his conversion to pacifism—active, militant pacifism, of course—and his becoming News (with a capital N) to Dollblatz, the founder of *Christian Force*.

This odd organization had come into being towards the middle of the war; and at first was regarded by most people—even those who signed the pompous attestation-paper, and paid over their five shillings annual contribution—as a Protestant counterpart of Cardinal Hinsley's inevitably Roman Catholic *Sword of the Spirit*. The aims—on paper—were as similar as ritual and theological differences allowed. Both were staunchly for peace; though the *Sword of the Spirit*, unlike *Christian Force*, was more latitudinarian in its interpretation of what constituted a 'just' war. Both were founded on the traditional principles of Christian morality; and both advocated the Rule of Law of that Universal, Spiritual Kingdom, of which the King is Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Dollblatz had been baptized at an early age, if not in extreme infancy. He was, therefore, a Christian; and he had always been a staunch Anglo-Catholic, even when his film company, tied up with—and, some said, subsidized by—every professedly or unacknowledgedly Communist organization, had been turning out Communist propaganda.

For twenty years, Dollblatz had produced nothing but Communist films; many of which were introduced into the programmes of the big circuits as 'educational'. Dollblatz, however, never denied that he was producing, by Communists, for those whom the Communists hoped to convert. Afterwards, all his script-writers and producers joined the Labour Party rather than go to prison under Paragraph 18b of the Defence of the Realm Act; and later—to get themselves the jobs that they needed—they solemnly renounced Communism.

Dollblatz did not do this. He had no need to renounce Communism; for, as he blandly pointed out, he had never been a Communist: he had never had more to do with Communism—with its dissemination—than the making of films designed to convert the viewer to Communism. What was he? A Christian—an Anglo-Catholic. Always had been. Politics? A Liberal, of course. Always had been.

Then why the encouragement to professed Communist writers and poets to air their views in Dollblatz films?

Because I'm a Liberal, old man! I hate tyranny. I believe everyone has a right to his own opinion.

When the International Society for Russian Friendship voted him its gold medal, in recognition of his services to the establishment of Communism in the British Empire, Dollblatz returned the medal, with a polite note, to say that *he* had done nothing of the sort; and that, had—say—Liberalism been as fashionable a creed as Communism, between 1930 and the outbreak of the war, he would have ventured his capital in making films with a Liberal theme. 'It was a matter of business,' said Dollblatz; 'first, foremost and all the time.'

When the profit looked to disappear from handling Communism, Dollblatz turned his attention to a crusade for Bigger and Better Christianity; and to Christianity (which does not appeal to everyone) he attached pacifism (which has a wider appeal). He had no trouble at all in finding a committee; he had only to look up the committees of the crank organizations, from those which fight for the rights of performing mice to those which pick the gates of the prisons within which murderers are being hanged.

Dollblatz, having gathered his own committee, and passed the hat around, did some organizing on his own account. He took the Albert Hall several times, to denounce all sorts of offences against Universal Love; such as the expulsion, by the Americans, of two unsavoury journalists; or the imprisonment, by the French, of a man convicted, on plain evidence, of the brutal massacre of some two hundred 'hostages'. Wherever, reading the newspapers, Dollblatz saw a chance of poking the noses of himself and his committee into the affairs of another country, Dollblatz would take that chance—and hire the Albert Hall to air his views.

His committee were, as most people remarked, a rum lot. Lady novelists, unworried by male attractiveness, and unburdened with normal domestic cares; dons whose political theories accorded well with the archaeology which had been their life's work; persons of dubious racial origins connected with cotton-spinning; and barristers whose experience had been gained mostly in defending seditionists and traitors: such made up the staple of Dollblatz's committee; though there was a female divine who had written a book on 'sane sex-practice' (for Christian married people only, of course), two very odd

soldiers who had been converted to Dollblatz Christianity in the jungle, and one or two lecturers from the London School of Economics.

That there was money in all this, everyone but the starry-eyed dreamers in *Christian Force* knew. What, however, people could not quite understand was the method by which Dollblatz had made a non-profit-making organization, concerned solely with interfering in everyone's business but its own, pay him a profit.

But there was a profit, just as there was much more capital than seemed reasonable to the enemies of *Christian Force*. The economics of world-reforming institutions, though, have always been a source of headaches to the non-members.

In the Bishop of Rowcester, *Christian Force* had got its most important and valuable recruit. James Henry Edwards, though an undoubted crank, was no fool. And he was a mere forty-two, against the sixty, seventy—even eighty—of the other important names on *Christian Force's* committee. (Dollblatz was just fifty-five: too young for the first war; too old for the second.)

The Bishop was ambitious; and he knew how best, in our own days, his ambition was to be served. Ecclesiastics, in other days, could have looked for preferment—they lacking powerful patrons—to sanctity of life, or to success in converting the heathen; to working miracles or showing an aptitude for organization or diplomacy. The Bishop knew that the safest road to high office in the Church of England was the ability to get one's name into the daily papers. He could—as had been done by others in the past—have gained newspaper mention by denouncing as childish superstition (and worse) certain fundamental dogma of Christianity. Instead, the Bishop preferred to gain his needed fame by denouncing as ungodly all forms of punishment, especially when awarded to traitors. Dollblatz got him to head a petition to release Isidore Chemnitz from prison, to which he had been sent when it had been proven that he had sold the secret of the rhodium bomb to Russia for two hundred and thirty-seven pounds, and four bottles of London-distilled vodka. 'No one but an idealist would have acted as Chemnitz did,' the Bishop told a startled audience in Trafalgar Square. 'The sum that he received proves this. . . .'

He believed—so he said—that all murderers were insane; and that the lunatic asylum, and not the gallows, was the

proper destination for the murderer. But it was observed that the Bishop came out most loudly on the side of the really bestial killers—especially those who raped and mutilated children. He could often be quite silent in the defence of a man who had merely bashed his nagging wife to death with some handy object, such as a flat-iron or the Hoover. (Doubtless the idealism there was hard to discern. . . .)

When, as sometimes happened, people would argue that the murderers had been condemned after a fair trial, and executed according to the judgement of the law; the Bishop would answer that the law was a wrong law—man-made, and not in harmony with the principle of Divine Mercy. The Law of Man must be altered, to bring it into accord with the Law of God.

Within his own diocese, however, the Bishop was a strict disciplinarian. He insisted upon—and usually exacted—unquestioning obedience; and for all his leanings towards Anglo-Catholicism, he would not permit his parish priests the licence to indulge even such trivial and harmless aberrations as auricular confession or incense.

Alan Cartwright loathed him.

Phyllida thought afterwards that it had been curious: the way that the critic, with his nose for news, had dismissed her story of the memorial tablet's removal from his mind. It was, in fact, a tired, bored and exceedingly junior reporter, hunting through the lesser provincial papers for a 'lead' (you sometimes found something, he wearily persuaded himself) who came across the report, in the *Rowcester Courant*, of a sermon preached at Hasling. He showed it to the Night News Editor—without much hope that the story was worth anything—and thereby took the matter of the tablet out of the circumscribed field of provincial gossip into the temporarily unlimited province of world affairs.

The time was five minutes to four of a very cold, very dark morning. Ten minutes ago, the Newspaper Workers' Club had shut its doors; and as the reporter was 'on' until five o'clock—and as Smithfield Market (whose pubs opened at four o'clock) was too far distant that he might slip out and have one—he resigned himself to get through the remaining hour of work with as good a will as he could. Sighing for the frustrating quality of fate, which could condemn him to waste his time hunting through the long, tight-packed and intolerably

dull columns of the provincials for news—at least, in one hundred tons of pitchblende, you could *expect* a milligramme of radium!—the reporter forced his aching eyes to scan the yards of print; forced his mouth to stop yawning; forced his attention away from the paralysed hands of the bald-faced clock.

When he came to the heading, he nearly passed it: he was so tired, so bored, so unhoping. But something in the heading caught his attention. He re-read; and got slowly up from his chair; to shamle across the empty floor of the news-room, and enter the silent cubby-hole of the Night News Editor.

The reporter said nothing as he prodded the N.N.E. awake, and thrust at him the copy of the *Rowcester Courant*, with the paragraph of 'Hasling News' outlined in blue pencil.

As silently, the Night News Editor, rubbing sleep from his swollen eyes, accepted the proffered copy. In silence he read the paragraph. He looked up at the reporter, and handed the newspaper back. He said, 'When d'you go off? Five?'

'Five. Thank Christ!'

'Um. Yeah. Well: tell you what. Copy that off; and leave it on your desk. Lemme see: who's in at five who could follow that up? Richardson, isn't he?' The Night News Editor cast a listless eye at a sheet of paper thumb-tacked to the planking-wall. 'Yeah . . . Richardson. Tell you what: make a note, and tell Richardson to look into it. No good 'phoning anyone now; but if Richardson was to get down there first thing, he could . . . Here: lemme have another look at that.' The Night News Editor was waking up; and his brain was waking up with him. He snatched the newspaper out of the reporter's limp hand, and sat up in his worn, creaking office-chair, frowning down at the paper. Then he laid the paper down on his desk, swung his chair around, and concentrated on studying the paragraph, his head between his hands.

The paragraph was headed—under the general heading, HASLING:

FACULTY REFUSED

'They certainly know news when they see it!' the N.N.E. scoffed.

The Revd. Alan Cartwright, D.S.O., M.C., Rector of Hasling, referred in a sermon on Sunday last to the refusal of the Bishop of Rowcester (the Rt. Revd. James Edwards, D.D., M.A. (Oxon.)) to grant a faculty for the erection of a memorial tablet, in the church of St. Mary Ever Virgin, Hasling (the Parish Church), to

the memory of the late Squadron-Leader Philip Hammond, D.S.O., D.F.C., a former parishioner.

REGRETTABLE OCCURRENCE

The Rector of Hasling referred to a 'regrettable occurrence', when, he said, an Inspector of the Northsexshire County Constabulary, accompanied by a police-sergeant and a constable, as well as three workmen, had forcibly removed Squadron-Leader Hammond's tablet from the wall. He also referred to disturbances in the church at the time of the tablet's removal, but claimed that the attitude of the Inspector was entirely to blame for this.

APPROPRIATE TEXT

For his sermon, the Rector said that he was choosing the most appropriate text he knew: Mark XII, 17. This text was, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' Most people knew this text, but they were not so familiar with the line which came immediately afterwards: 'And they marvelled at Him.' Why did they marvel at Our Saviour? Because He saw the truth. The Rector explained that he felt that he owed obedience to his Bishop only in the things which concerned his religious duty; but he felt that the question whether or not a tablet, erected to the memory of a gallant airman, should be allowed to remain in the church, was not one for any Bishop, so long as there was nothing disgraceful in the wording on the tablet.

THE REAL REASON

The real reason for the Bishop's refusal, the Rector continued, was his dislike—he would put it no stronger—of any praise of patriotic duty. The Bishop, the Rector said, is a proclaimed Pacifist, and a so-called Internationalist. He had no quarrel with the Bishop's views, but felt that his action in ordering the removal of the tablet to the late Squadron-Leader Hammond was inspired more by political prejudice than by any respect for ecclesiastical discipline.

The reporter saw the N.N.E.'s shoulders straighten, and his heart sank. The prospect of a quick one in *The Swan* in Covent Garden at five minutes past five, on the reporter's way to his home in Cricklewood, faded. The N.N.E. did not wake up at four in the morning except when his nose twitched to the smell of a story—and it was reporters, the reporter told himself gloomily, who had to go out and get the story.

'Nip along to the library,' said the N.N.E. without bothering to look up, 'and get a *Crockford's*. This Rector sounds a bit of a handful, even after the *Rowcester Courant's* newspaper

geniuses have filleted all the guts out of it. Oh . . . yes: and by the way, you'd better get the Bishop of Rowcester's file while you're about it. Can you call anything to mind about him, offhand?'

'I covered that Peace Meeting at the Albert Hall last June. I heard him speak. Once,' the reporter added, 'is enough. I'll get the *Crockford's* and his file. Shan't be a tick.'

'Yeah. An' better get *Who's Who* while you're there. The files don't always have everything. Funny,' the N.N.E. said, half to himself, 'but I feel that we're in for a bit of activity here.'

'You're telling me!' the reporter said bitterly, over his shoulder. 'I'm going to get the Air Force list as well—if the story concerns this Squadron-Leader Whosit, as well.'

'Yes. Do that, too. Now, get a trickle on, for *Chrysake!*'

'Get a trickle on? Well, — me! I like *that*. . . '

'Go on! Go and get those things! We shall fall down on the story if you keep me waiting any longer. . . '

While the reporter was in the library, finding for himself what a too-sleepy librarian refused to hunt up, the Night News Editor studied the report from Hasling; half in contempt for the provincials, which could be blind to the news-value of a story; half in gratitude that they could leave such godsend to be of advantage to others. His quick, conscienceless brain sketched out a 'routine'—as he called it. Better not wait for Richardson. It might be too late even at eight o'clock. All over London, there were reporters and subs idly glancing through the provincials, looking for something that, in more experienced, less delicate hands, might provide the meat for a first-class story. No . . . Hell. . . ! Where was Hasling?

The reporter came back with his haul of reference works.

'Where's Hasling? Do you know?' the Night News Editor asked.

'Not exactly. It's—I think—in Northsexshire. Somewhere there, anyway.'

'Well, go and get an *A.B.C.*, and we'll know for certain. I'll look up the parties while you're gone.'

The reporter went off, angrily whistling, under his breath. He could see what was coming.

When he returned, the Night News Editor, callously ignoring the suffering look on the younger man's face, said with a noticeable complacency:

'Well, me lad! This *is* interesting. The Rector—it's a

Reverend Cartwright—is a double D.S.O., an M.C., a Croyder Gurr, and Hem knows what! Only twenty-eight, and rose to full colonel from the ranks.'

'As a padre?'

'As my ——! No: a real soldier!' The N.N.E. laughed. 'No wonder he don't like the Bish! Do you know what *his* little mob is?'

'I told you. Peace . . .'

'Yes, I know it's Peace. But d'you know *what* Peace mob?' He leaned forward and stabbed a dirty forefinger into the reporter's grubby necktie. '*Dollblatz's*. . . '

'Oh-ho. . . !' And now the reporter realized that he, too, was beginning to wake up. 'Dollblatz, eh? Now, there's a b—— who I can't understand why he wasn't in 18-b! Had my way, I'd 'a' shot the bastard, and no bloody argument!'

'Me, too. You read between the lines; you can see this Bish is chief can-carrier for that Master Bleeding Communist Dollblatz. I wonder if the Bish is one himself?'

The reporter had turned up Hasling in the *A.B.C.*

'Get to Hasling from Liverpool Street. Forty-one and three-quarter miles. (Wonderful how precise the ole *A.B.C.* is, don't you think?)'

'Do you know it? Hasling?' the N.N.E. asked innocently.

'No,' said the reporter, falling into the trap. 'Can't say I do.'

'Then,' said the Night News Editor, with a grin, 'here's your chance. Give us that *A.B.C.*, and we'll find you a nice fast train.'

'Fer *cry-in*' out loud! I'm due off in under an hour! Can't you send Richardson?'

'No, I can't. Don't argue. Besides . . . do *you* want Richardson to cop the scoop of the year?'

The reporter said sulkily:

'How do you know it'll be the scoop of the year? It can't be so much. Trust the provincials to miss most things; but they don't miss everything.'

'Sit down for a moment,' said the Night News Editor; 'and I'll tell you a story. . . '

'Is it the one about the advertisement for the missing heir? Okay. When do I go?'

'You'd better take a few notes out of these. I'll look up a train, and write you out a chit for the cashier. I've got a feeling there's a *hell* of a story in this . . . handled properly.'

The reporter said, 'A really nice story would be the D.S.O.'

parson having a stand-up fight with the Pacifist Bishop. Now, that'd be more *like!*'

A slow smile stretched the Night News Editor's lips. He patted the reporter's arm in a gesture at once minatory and consoling.

'And that, my lad, is your principal task. Yes . . . that's right. You've got it. It'll be up to you to see that such an interesting spectacle is reported for our five million readers. Think you can do it?'

The reporter smiled in his turn.

'I get you! I'll just jot down a few notes. . . .'

Afterwards, Phyllida used to excuse herself for what she would always think of as her indiscretion by saying that the reporter had called on her while she was still asleep.

'He'd got it all out of me,' she said to Mr. Chrimes, 'before I had quite woken up to the fact that he was pumping me. . . .'

Mr. Chrimes consoled her.

'I don't see that you've got anything to reproach yourself with, Mrs. Hammond. If you hadn't told him, he'd have got it elsewhere. But he might have got a garbled version; that's the only thing. All things considered, I think it was just as well he *did* come to you. Best person, really. . . .'

'Well, I don't know . . . ' said Phyllida.

It had been a puzzling business altogether, and something had left what Phyllida called a 'nasty taste in her mouth'.

Her reading had induced in her a belief—unexamined, but unquestioningly accepted—that expert cross-examination, whether by police-officers or members of M.I.5; whether by learned counsel or qualified psychiatrists; was an exercise only for minds of immense experience and needle-sharp acuity. The mental images created, over a long period of reading, had fused eventually into the composite but unblurred portrait of a grave, chill-eyed man of middle years, with a high forehead, a quiet (almost clinical) manner, and dress which, while eschewing any foppishness, yet testified, in its sober excellence, to the established position that the examiner's mental qualities had secured for him in society.

That, had such a person come to cross-examine Phyllida, she would have been very much on the defensive, she overlooked when marvelling that a shabbily dressed, unshaven youth of some twenty-five uneducated years should have

probed for, and found, what Phyllida chose afterwards to consider her 'most cherished secrets'.

The reporter had caught the 6.32 from Liverpool Street. He had a cup of tea at Alf's Pull-in Café, half a mile beyond the cross-roads at Hasling; and he found himself opening the gate of Mrs. Stevens's front garden in time to let the postman through.

He rang the bell twice, knowing that anyone within hearing distance would believe that the postman had called back; and the problem of getting into the house had been solved by the enterprising newspaperman on his way to Mrs. Stevens's house.

It was the 'daily' who had answered the postman's ring. As she opened the door again, she said:

'Oh . . . I thought it was the postman?' It was at once a statement and a question.

The reporter walked into the hall, his hat on his head, his hands, since it was a cold morning, in the pockets of his dirty raincoat.

'Mrs. Hammond in?' he asked, with a comprehensive survey, not only of the daily's face, but of the near-shabby but expensively tended furnishings of the hall. The whine of a Hoover in a room close at hand made hearing difficult. The daily said:

'You want to see Mrs. Hammond? I don't think she's up yet.'

Imitating his idea of what a policeman might have been expected to do; and relying somewhat on the supposition that no policeman had called yet—certainly not at half-past eight in the morning—on anyone living at 'The Firs':

'Just tell her I'd like a word with her,' said the reporter, nodding his head in the direction of the stairs, and turning away to pretend to study the wall-barometer.

The daily, staring for a moment at the reporter's back, scratched her neck under the edge of her grubby cotton frock. Who was it? she asked herself. Seemed pretty sure of himself, anyway. She tried to pluck up courage to ask the caller to state his business more exactly, but the man's back daunted her (as the reporter had intended that it should). Telling herself that she wasn't paid to work things out, the woman climbed wearily up the stairs.

The reporter's sharp ears caught the words, 'Someone to see you, Mum. . . .'

Then a door closed, and he could not hear even the muted sound of voices.

Two minutes later he was still studying the barometer, as Phyllida, tightening the silken cord of her dressing-gown, came down the stairs, her eyes open and (he thought he saw) a little disturbed in inquiry.

'Yes? You wished to see me?'

'Mrs. Hammond? Good morning! Sorry to call so early. . . .'

'Oh, that's quite all right.' She smiled. 'I hadn't got up . . .'

He said, 'It's about the memorial tablet. . . .'

'Oh? Shall we go into this room?' said Phyllida.

It had been as simple as that. The alteration in the reporter's plans had been made while he was drinking a cup of orange-bright tea in Alf's Pull-in.

Alf was a Londoner, and though he knew that the plain-clothes police do favour—almost as a uniform—those Raglan-cut raincoats, he had not, so far, seen a split who fancied the sort of felt hat that you can buy in the Charing Cross Road: one of the shaggy, wide-brimmed kind, with a hat-band made of interlocked heart-shaped bits of the same colour felt.

A reporter, Alf summed up his early-morning visitor; and prepared to wait for the questions.

The questions began to come half-way through the first cup of tea; and Alf, to give him his due, was not reticent with information. Londoner's heart warmed to Londoner's heart; both united in fraternal sympathy against the rustics upon whom Alf had to depend to some extent for his living.

Alf said, 'Look, chum, you don't have to go all the way round to get to where you want. What paper you on?'

'*Trumpet* . . .' The reporter grinned, vigorously stirring the six lumps with which he had sweetened his tea. 'You can spot 'em, eh?'

'Lumme, boy, I 'ad a caff in Gunpowder Alley—back o' Fleet Street—before Jerry dropped a load o' s—t on it one night. I copped a packet, too; and I come down 'ere for a bit o' peace-an'-quiet, like. If I don't know one of you blokes when I see one. . . .!'

'Okay, Alf, then: what's the drill about this business of the coppers snatching a tombstone out of the church? Anything in it?'

Alf drew hard on his Woodbine, studying his visitor with a hard, black; calculating eye. He asked, 'Where was you goin' first? I suppose you got *some* facts?'

The reporter drew out his notebook, and tapped it with a finger.

'Such as the local rag could give me. (Not that that was much.) I thought I'd hop off and see the Vicar—Rector—whatever he is—first. Get *his* story.'

Alf said, 'You don't wanna do that. Mrs. Hammond's the one you wanna see. . . .'

'Yeah. The widow?'

'That's right. Smart bit o' goods.' Alf's eyes rolled for a moment, to show how smart the bit of goods was. 'You wanna get her story first, and *then* see the Rector. Know about him?'

'Only that he rose to full colonel, and got himself a load of gongs,' said the reporter, reading from his notebook.

'That's right. He's *hot*, is the Rector. There's no flies on that boy! Ah! Often had a cup o' char in 'ere,' said Alf, masking his pride under a fine show of casualness. 'Same 's me an' you. But . . . boy! . . . ain't he a *tiger*, you cross him the wrong way!'

'You think Mrs. Hammond first?'

'Yus. Lives in a house called "The Firs".' Alf pointed through the uncurtained window. 'Straight up there, and on your left. Can't miss it. No . . . what I was saying: we reckon the Rector's got something up his sleeve. We can't see *him* layin' dahin an' lettin' the Bishop s——t all over 'im. Ah, no! That's not Rector's way: you take it from me!'

'Giss another tea, Alf; and chuck us a packet of crisps! Hasn't the Rector done anything yet? What about the tablet? What's happened to that?'

'Well,' said Alf, pouring out the tea, 'the *tablet's* at Mr. Chrimes's—he's the bank-manager. Leastways, he opens up a small bank they got here on two or three days a week (depending whether it's market or not) and the rest of the time he's just a clurk at Staintree. But he lives here; and that's where the tablet was took when the Inspector 'acked it off the wall. Bloody near a riot there was: I'm tellin' you, boy!'

'I bet!' said the reporter, taking his tea, and putting down a sixpenny-piece.

'Yus. And woulda bin, too, if Rector hadn't stopped it. One thing about these bloody yokels, chum; they don't take kind to 'igh-'anded conduct. They'd a soon bashed them copper: as look at 'em. On'y Rector wouldn' a stood for that. . . .'

'He had his nerve, stopping 'em?'

'They like him,' said Alf. 'I don't never go to church; but

they say he's a tiger in the pulpit. Don't 'arf lay it on. But they respect him, 'cause he don't say one thing an' do another.

'And if anyone's in a bit o' trouble—no matter he don't go to church—there's Rector handy to give him a bit of a bracer. He's all right is Rector. An' another thing: he's a real man.'

'An' you think he's going to spring something on this Conchy Bishop of yours?'

Alf winked.

'I shouldn't drop dahn dead o' shock if I was to hear the Rector had got up to somethink. Tell you one thing,' said Alf, resting both elbows on the American-cloth-covered counter, 'I lay that there tablet's not going to colleck cobwebs in Mr. Chrimes's tool-shed. If Rector don't do nothing, Mrs. Hammond will. Ah!'

'Tell us something about *her* . . .' the reporter said.

By eleven o'clock the reporter had been exactly one hour in the saloon bar of *The Flitch*. At half-past ten he had asked for—and been given—permission to use the landlord's private telephone.

Keeping his voice as low as possible, he had said to the News Editor:

'Look . . . this is going to be Big. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah . . . but look: if you don't mind, I'd like to suggest I'd better stay down here for at least the next twenty-four hours. Yeah. I'm speaking from a pub called *The Dunmow Flitch* . . . yeah: that's right: *The Dunmow Flitch*. I can stay here: they've got a couple of rooms. Telephone number? Hang on a mo. Okay . . . here it is. Hasling 03456. No . . . thank God! Not a smell of anyone else.

'That's why I'd rather, if you don't mind, keep it until I've got everything. Yeah. Okay. An' . . . *here!* Have you seen a film called . . . No, of course not: it isn't out yet. Okay: I'll tell you later. But is this Big . . . or is it Big? Okay. But you know you can rely on me, if I say it is?'

'Can I?' said the distant, bored, sceptical voice. 'How much money do you want wiring to you? I'd better send you a tenner: will that be enough?'

'Better make it twenty. There may be a bit of corruption needed.'

'You'll get fifteen . . . and like it. Better 'phone this afternoon. You're not far from Staintree, are you?'

'Matter of half an hour's bus-ride.'

'Okay. Get into Staintree when the pubs close, and 'phone from there. It's a biggish place, and I don't trust these bloody yokels on the exchange. Good luck!'

The reporter went back into the bar, to order another pint apiece for Fred Shipton and Dick Waite.

What a bit of luck! the reporter thought. *What* a slice of jam, meeting these two! The very lads who've started all the 'rouble!

The pints slid over the counter, pushed by a landlord who was as interested in the reporter as he was interested in everything that *The Flitch's* customers could tell him.

'Best respects, Guv!' said Dick, downing quite half the glass tankard, and then wiping his ginger moustache on the back of a ginger-furred hand. 'Yes . . . you'd have fair died when I tole that here Inspector he oughter got hisself a reserved ockypation! 'W'ouldn' he 'a' fair died, Landlord?'

'I say!' said the landlord. 'Come to that, I'd a give a pretty penny to heard it meself. But you want to watch out for *your* hide, Dick; along o' that Inspector. He won't like yew so much, I'm rackoning.'

'I rackon tew, said Dick, laughing. 'But happen I'll set a snare for *he*, well's for them rabbits they're allus saying I'm arter. . . .'

Loud laughter greeted this rustic jest in which the reporter could join; for though the allusion missed him, he could welcome the opportunity to laugh at the rustic uncouthness of his companions' speech. He said:

'Isn't he a local man, this Inspector of yours?'

The three others looked at each other; but it was the landlord who elected to answer.

'We-e-e-ll,' he drawled; 'he is and he isn't, in a manner o' speakin'. Happen he was born here, and happen he don't live no more 'n a matter o' two mile away, up be Shafter's Beeches. But he's a constabulary man; and us don't think that makes a man local-like, do us, boys? Aye! He'd as lief clap the irons on we as us'd like to shove him in the pond!'

Dick and Fred laughed until the tears ran down their faces. *They* knew why the landlord had no love for the Inspector.

'Did you know Squadron-Leader Hammond?' the reporter asked.

Solemnity descended upon the laughing faces.

'No, sir, I never,' said the landlord; 'and that's a fact. Come to that, it's him marryin' Miss Phyllida, whose old dad was

the nicest, kindest, tender-heartedest man you ever met, God rest him. . . . Eh, Dick?

'That the God's gospel truth it is, Harry. . . .'

'Ah. Well, 's I was sayin': it was along of Mr. Hammond courtin' Miss Phyllida when she was up in London, brought Mr. Hammond down *here*. But he was never a Hasling man, like; and no more was he killed local. When they dropped them bombs what killed him, that was over to Wright's Pike—Framlington way. But, mark you, Mr. Hammond used to drop in for his pint like a Christian, when he was staying here with Miss Phyllida's folk. An' sometimes he'd come in alone, an' sometimes he'd come in with the ole doctor. Turns out he was a writer, like; though I can't say as I've ever read anythink he wrote. Have you, sir?'

'No. But he was quite well known, I believe. Tell me: was Mrs. Hammond pretty cut up when her husband died?'

'Broke her heart, sir. Ah! Fair broke her heart. . . .'

'We was all sorry for her,' said Dick. 'We was that. . . .'

'That's right,' said Fred. 'She's got a high sperrit, has Miss Phyllida; but she's a fine young lady, sir; and all Hasling's agreed on *that*.'

That's warning me! the reporter noted. *I'd better go tactfully. These yokels can be very touchy when you least expect it.*

He said, with an artfully contrived solemnity, 'From what I hear, I couldn't agree with you more. Everyone *I've* met has spoken most highly of the lady. I wonder,' he added to no one in particular, 'if she'll get married again?'

The landlord pulled his lower lip.

'It don't seem as though she *wants* to. O' course, there's Mr. Chrimes from the bank who's bin making sheep's eyes at her ever since he come over here from Staintree. But I can't see Miss Phyllida taking on Mr. Chrimes, not after the squadron-leader: can you, Dick?'

'I can't. . . .'

'All the same, she's a fine-made woman; and it ain't natural for a healthy young woman to go on living with what's over,' said Fred.

'Do you know, sir,' said the landlord, 'that I've heard she saved up, out of her earnings, to buy that there memorial. Judkins—he was the stone-mason carved it (lives along here: on the right)—more or less admitted it cost Miss Phyllida more'n a hundred pound. Ah. . . ! That's a tidy sum.'

'It's a mort o' money,' said Dick.

'Out of her wages?'

'Yes, sir. During the war she drove one of them cars for some Cabinet Minister or other. And then, when Mr. Hammond was killed, she came home for a bit. But I don't reckon she could stand that. So she offs an' gets herself a job in some London office.

'But that's what Judkins told me: that she'd saved up, week he week, until she had enough to order a real fine stone for her husband. There's not many wives 'd do that, sir, I'm thinking.'

'More they wouldn't,' said Dick. 'So you can see, sir, why I ups an' tells that gurt copper what I thinks, when he comes along to pull Mrs. Hammond's tablet off the wall. You see, sir, we all knows what it must 'a' meant to Mrs. Hammond, saving up, an' that.

'Yes, an' what's more: we all knows the Inspector knows too.

'That's what makes it so *riling*. . . .'

'What'll happen to this tablet, d'you think?' the reporter asked, signing to the landlord to set them up again all round.

Dick looked a' Fied, and smiled. The landlord, smiling, looked ostentatiously out of the window before pulling on the pumps.

'Ah . . . well,' said Fred, 'we sort of had an idea, like . . .'

The Rector thought that he had summed up the shabby, pushing young man; but the shabby, pushing young man had been first in the matter of summing-up. His attitude was most respectful as he said, 'I'd better lay my cards on the table, sir. Straight away.'

'That's always a good idea,' said Alan Cartwright; 'it saves trouble later.'

' . . . So,' said the reporter, with a deceptively frank air, 'I'm going to ask you, sir, first of all, if you propose to leave the matter where it is at present?'

The Rector frowned.

'I . . . I'm afraid that I don't quite understand you. Are you suggesting that I could—even if I should wish it—bring myself to oppose His Lordship's orders?'

The reporter thought quickly. He said to himself, *This man may be dressed up in a parson's fancy rig; but he rose from the ranks to be a full colonel. And no Whitehall colonel, either! Don't tell me he has*

any time for this Conchy Bishop of his! And . . . oi! he says that he wouldn't think of disobeying an order from the Bish. But . . . here! . . . hasn't he already done that? What about his putting up the tablet without getting permission?

To his natural impudence, the reporter had added the courage which had come from six pints of *The Flitch's* four-X ale. *I can only get kicked out*, he reassured himself, as he decided to take a chance with this parson. He said, gravely, but with a certain hint of amusement in his tone, 'I think, sir, that you would listen to very few things but your own conscience in important matters.'

Mr. Cartwright studied the ordinary—too ordinary face—for a long minute, while his frown gave place to a half-smile.

'You reporters have a gall, haven't you?' he said, with a sort of reluctant admiration.

'Stock-in-trade, sir, I'm afraid.'

'I expect it must be. You want a story, don't you?'

'If there's a story to be got,' said the reporter cautiously.

'You know that this has already appeared in the newspapers? In the *Rowcester Courant*, to be exact.'

The reporter refrained from expressing his view of the mind which could think of the *Rowcester Courant* as a newspaper; he had professional sixth-sense to warn him, besides, that the Rector was not one of those who take kindly to newspaper interference, in any case. He said:

'Yes, sir. I did see the report. But it was mostly concerned with your sermon, sir. And that'—the reporter simply couldn't help himself—'wasn't the way *we'd* have handled it. . . .'

'Handled what?' The Rector was smiling.

'The . . . well: the news angle. It's . . . well, sir: it's hard to explain . . . but . . .'

The Rector said, 'May I offer you a drink? I don't know what I've got; but I think I can find something.' He got up, and went over to a sideboard. 'Um. Care for a glass of sherry?'

'Thank you very much, sir.'

Mr. Cartwright got out the bottle, and two glasses. He filled the glasses, and handed one to the reporter, who rose to accept the glass. The Rector, carefully holding his own glass, sat down.

'Tell me: what's . . . Well: what does your editor find so important in all this? (Cheers, by the way!).'

'Cheer-oh, sir! Oh . . . *that*? Well . . . I was ordered out on a story. And . . . well: here I am. . . .'

The Rector said quietly, his grey eyes very firmly fixed on his guest:

'I imagine that, even if I didn't give you anything, you'd still have a story to tell? "Rector Refuses To Speak." Something like that, eh?'

The reporter drank his wine. He said, 'It's rather like *you*, sir. No offence: but I'm a very small number in the *Trumpet*. It's like being in the Army, sir: I get my orders, and I carry them out.'

'Very creditable. . . .'

'Yes. Well: I'll tell you. We picked up this item in the *Rowcester Courant*; and we saw there might be a story. We . . .'

'Do forgive me. You say, "We thought there might be a story." But . . . what exactly do you mean by that "We thought there might be a story"? What is a story?'

(No: the parson wasn't pulling his leg. The reporter took his courage in both hands.)

'Look, sir: I'll come clean with you. A story—to *us*—is something which brings in something that involves human values.'

'Human values?'

'Yes, sir. My paper sells five million a day. They've tried to suppress it. They say it's immoral, obscene, seditious—anything else they can think of. But it sells five million a day. Do you know why?'

'No,' said the Rector, with a smile. 'But I imagine your editor does. . . .'

'You're right, sir. Five million copies are sold every day, because we go straight for the things which interest the ordinary human being. All right—a little defiantly—'we deal in sex. But we deal in religion, too. And we deal in the things that ordinary people think about. Put it bluntly: we're a sort of gossip-over-the-back-wall. Why not?'

'Why not, indeed? But why should my little quarrel with the Bishop interest you? Or . . . well: why should it interest your editor so much?'

The reporter accepted another glass of sherry.

'Thank you, sir! You ask me a question: I'll answer it. *You* represent the ordinary man. . . .'

'Oh. . . !'

'Yes, sir. When I write up your story, the readers are going to say: crikey! that's the way I'd feel—or, I'd have behaved—or, I'd have liked to act. Let me tell you something, sir. . . .'

'Do. . . !'

'Well, then: it's this. Most people don't like laws. They think they're all right, so long as they more or less match up with what they think is right anyway. But when they think they see some Colonel Blimp using laws to gratify his own prejudice, they don't like that . . . and they don't like the laws that allowed Colonel Blimp to chuck his weight around.'

'Colonel Blimp being a generic name for . . .'

'If you like, sir. What we think is this: your bishop doesn't really care two hoots what you put up on the church wall.

'But what he does care about is whether what you put up is—this is the way we look at it—a reflection on what he's set up, not so much to defend, as to attack. Half a mo', sir: I'll try and make myself clear. The Bishop's a conch . . . I mean . . .'

'Never mind,' the Rector smiled; 'you can call him a conchy if you like. A conchy, then?'

'Yes, sir. I do like. A conchy. Well'—defiantly—'I've got my own views on what conchies are; and why they're conchies. . . .'

'You weren't in the war, of course?'

'Too young, sir. I was only a kid when it finished. I don't even remember it beginning. But . . . well: I got made up to staff-sergeant last week; so, if I had been old enough . . .'

'Staff-sergeant? Good for you! Territorials, of course? Which regiment?'

'East Middlesex Light Infantry, sir. They've made us into an L.O.C. mob now. It's interesting,' the reporter said, his eyes remote. 'Gosh! I wish I had been old enough. . . .'

'Do you? Oh, well . . . Well: about the Bishop. Do I, looking very intently at the reporter; 'do I take it that . . . well, I don't know quite how to express this . . . but, is your editor rather against my Bishop?'

Innocently:

'Against him, sir?'

Bluntly:

'Is he on your newspaper's black-list, in any way?'

Blandly:

'We haven't got, so far as I know, such a thing as a black-list, sir. There's only some forms of chucking your weight about that we come down on like a ton of bricks, no matter who's doing the chucking about. But I don't know anything about a black-list, sir.'

'You wouldn't!' said the Rector, dryly. 'All right, then: I can

at least think this—that you wouldn't need any great persuasion to give the Bishop a working-over. Tell me: is that *your* inclination—as a staff-sergeant in the East Middlesex Light Infantry?—or the inclination of your editor? I seem to remember that an episcopal colleague of the Bishop's—the Dean of Bethersden—came in for a certain amount of criticism from your paper.'

'When he refused to officiate at the memorial service—when they wanted to unveil that new memorial down at Dover. . . .'

'You've a good memory.'

'In my job, sir.'

'Let me give you another glass of sherry? Care for a biscuit?'

'Thank you, sir. But you get to develop a memory for facts in our game. It's doing it bit by bit. A fact here; a fact there. It was murder,' he said reminiscently, 'when I first started. I wondered how they could expect me to remember everything. It seemed like persecution. But . . . I got used to it. Well . . . here's health, sir!'

'And yours! Look: I'm going to ask you to be very frank with me.'

'I will if I can, sir.'

'Yes . . . I'm sure. But I want you to forget, for a moment, that you're a newspaperman, come down here to get a story out of me. Is that possible?'

The reporter grinned.

'Possible . . . yes. But darned hard, sir!'

The Rector smiled.

'I suppose so. But—haven't you some such phrase as "off the record"? Meaning, that whatever I say will not be repeated?'

'We have such a phrase, sir,' said the reporter, with undeniable earnestness. 'But I think it's only fair to you, sir—and, come to that, to me too—to tell you that people can't just *say* "Off the record, mind!" to us, and think there's some inescapable obligation on us to put our notebooks away and shut our ears—or, better still, blank out our memories.'

'You mean, you won't accept a confidence?'

The reporter gazed at the glass in his hand. He was conscious now more of the fact that he was a sergeant, and that the man talking to him was a colonel, than that he was a reporter and that the man talking to him was prospective 'copy'. He said slowly:

'I came down here, sir, to get a story. I've found it's

dangerous to forget what you've been ordered to do. Speaking for myself, you could tell me what you liked, sir, and I shouldn't say a word.

'But if you were to tell me something off the record, you might think that applied to more than you'd asked to be treated as confidential. You'd think I'd betrayed your confidence. And . . . I shouldn't like that. . . .'

'Then . . .'

'Then, sir, I can't let you tell me anything off the record. Either you tell me what I want to know in answer to my questions, or you don't.'

'You'll try to find the answers elsewhere?'

'I'd try'—stubbornly, but respectfully—'to do what my editor wants me to do.'

The Rector nodded. It seemed to the reporter that he was not displeased. The Rector said, with the air of one who has come to a decision, 'Very well. That's honest enough . . . and I admire honesty. What exactly do you wish to know?'

'I wish to know, sir, if you're going to let the matter of Mrs. Hammond's memorial tablet remain where it is?'

'You mean?'

'I mean sir, that the police—acting on the Bishop's orders—have come and done what I'd call sacrilege (and what our readers—ninety-nine-point-nine of 'em, anyway—would call sacrilege, too).'

'No, no,' said the Rector, gently, 'you really mustn't apply that word to it. It really wasn't sacrilege, you know. . . .'

'It's what our readers would call sacrilege,' said the reporter, at his most stubborn. 'And, what's more, sir, it's a worse sort of sacrilege, to my way of thinking. It's . . .'

He broke off, as though conscious that he had been about to go too far; but the Rector said, 'No. Don't stop. What were you going to say? What is a "worse sort of sacrilege"? Do you mean, not only removing something from a church, but removing something which is the honourable testimony to a gallant officer? I rather think that *that's* what you were going to say, if I'm not much mistaken? You were, eh?'

'Yes. Yes, sir: I was. . . .'

'I thought so.'

'Tell me, sir'—impulsively—'*why* is the Bishop so down on this particular tablet? Didn't he like Squadron-Leader Hammond? Doesn't he like Mrs. Hammond? Doesn't he. . . ?'

'Doesn't he like *me*?'

'Well, yes, sir. Or you. Or doesn't he like. . . ? Well, *what* doesn't he like? Can you tell me that?'

'Not altogether,' said the Rector, slowly and carefully. 'Except to say that you have got to think of us—the Bishop and me—as representing two opposite poles of sentiment regarding certain things, I can't really say very much. I don't like war, any more than he does. I regard it, as he regards it, as a shocking waste; as a criminal affair. But, unlike him, I don't necessarily see, as criminals, all who take part in war, from one cause or another.'

'But Squadron-Leader Hammond was only doing his duty, sir, even if he volunteered. If he hadn't volunteered, he'd have been roped in anyway.'

'Or had to declare himself a conscientious objector. . . . No: the only person with whom it would be profitable to pick holes in the Bishop's theories is . . . the Bishop himself. As you and I are so patently in agreement, there doesn't seem much point in going over all this. Think so?'

'I see what you mean, sir. But why is the Bishop so down on this particular tablet? Or isn't he down on this particular tablet? Would he be just as bad about any tablet to any chap that was killed fighting for his country?'

The Rector smiled: a rather bleak smile. He said, 'No. I rather imagine that his objection *is* to this particular tablet.' He nodded, seeing the interest spark up in the reporter's eyes. 'Yes. It's this particular tablet which has angered him; not so much that I omitted to ask his permission to erect it.'

'Because,' said the reporter slowly, taking his cue from the expression on the Rector's face, 'you knew that it *would* annoy him?'

'Have you seen the tablet yet?'

'No. Not yet. I understand it's round at Mr. Chrimes's, the bank-manager's. I thought I'd call on him after I'd seen you, sir.'

The Rector said, 'I rather think you should see the tablet—read the inscription on it, I mean—before you do anything else. It might give you a clue to the whole business.'

'I will, sir'—eagerly—'but haven't you got a copy here I could see?'

The Rector got up, and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

'Look, my dear chap: you just go and read it for yourself.'

'Yes, but . . . Now, look, sir: you've been very decent to me

this much. Can you tell me this: is it something in the inscription itself which has got the Bishop's goat? Is it?"

'Yes. Yes, it is.'

'All right, sir. I'll have a good look at it, and try and work it out for myself what's so objectionable about it.'

'It shouldn't be very difficult for you,' said the Rector, dryly.

'And there's just one more question I'd like you to answer, sir, if you would. I do hope you can,' the reporter added, pleadingly.

'There's no harm in your asking it, anyway. What is it?'

'It's this, sir. I take it you don't agree, either with the Bishop's pulling down the tablet, or his reasons for objecting to it? I take it that I may assume that?'

'You may.' He added: 'I thought it was the report of my sermon which brought you down here? My sermon made my attitude clear enough.'

'Yes, sir. I'd forgotten that for a moment. My question is this (I do hope you can answer it): What are you going to do next?'

The Rector stared out of the window, pulling at his lower lip.

He shook his head, turning slowly to face his questioner. He said, 'I'm afraid that I can't answer that. Sorry!'

'All right, sir: I understand. . . .'

'I wonder if you do?'

Grinning:

'I hope I do! But you *can* answer this one, sir. . . .'

'Well?'

The reporter closed his notebook, and snapped the elastic band around it. He put the book into his pocket, and stood up. He said, 'I'm going to assume that I'm right in saying that you don't propose to leave the matter as it is, sir. . . .'

'Oh,' the Rector said, giving him as straight a look; 'and what do you think justifies your assuming that?'

'Your character, sir,' said the young man. 'Now, sir . . . am I right?'

'You might be,' said the Rector, holding out his hand.

The reporter waited until after three o'clock before ringing his News Editor, so as to give the News Editor time to get back to the office from *The Cheshire Cheese*.

The reporter said, 'Me. Yeah. Look: I've seen everybody now—bar the Bish. An' I'm off to see him now.'

'A bash at the Bish, eh? Well, it's good to hear 'you're working, at last! What you found, so far?'

'Crikey! Everything! No . . . straight-up. It could be the biggest thing ever. You wait until I tell you. No . . . really. I mean it. It isn't just the old stuff about Persons in High Places giving a Soldier's Widow the Works. It's something more than that.'

The News Editor laughed.

'Well . . . I'll believe it when I see it. I expect you're only giving me the bull, so you can stay down there boozing. When you calling on the Bish?'

'Now. I'm catching a bus into Rowcester at three-forty-five. I ought to be on the palace doorstep—or climbing in the back window—at about five.'

'Have you given him a ring, to make an appointment?'

The reporter made a curious noise with his lips.

'Have I hell! You should hear what the locals have had to tell me about him. It'd be just a waste of time to ring him for an appointment. No . . . I'll just chance me arm, and barge in. If I wait on the doorstep long enough, he'll see me all right, whether he likes it or not!'

'Spoken like a *Trumpet* man! You'll go a long way, kid, you go on thinking along those lines. But . . . when you do see His Lordship, just remember to tell him this little bit of gossip, that's just come in on the P.A. tape. It's good you rang me. For I would so like to hear what His Lordship's going to say to you when you're able to tell him that Dollblatz is due at Bow Street at ten in the morning, to answer a summons for dealing in black-market quids.'

'No!'

'Ah, my bright-eyed youth: but *yes*! Now, look: if there's a quicker way to get out to Rowcester, you'd better take it. The trouble is, this isn't an exclusive. Even those lousy provincial evenings will have it in before six. Bound to. Can you get a hire-car?'

'I'll try. . . .'

'You won't try. You ll bloody well get one; or I'll want to know why. Now, hop off and get cracking. If it's important to see the Bish—and I take it, it is . . .'

'Essential. . . .'

'Then it's vital you catch him before he knows his lord and master, Ikey Dollblatz, is for the high jump. I want you—with your exquisite tact—to break the news to him gently. I should

hate some heavy-handed, uncouth person to break it. Now . . . hop off; and 'phone through when you've seen the Bish. We may have to move fast. Got it? Okay, then. Good luck!

The reporter stood in the middle of the road, and held both arms wide. The driver of Cameron Brothers' Morris Commercial stopped.

'Matter of life and death,' said the reporter, getting into the one passenger-seat. 'Can you get to Rowcester in thirteen minutes?'

'Look here, what's the lark?' the driver asked. 'I'm not going nowhere near Rowcester, come to that. Who are you?'

'Have you heard of the *Daily Trumpet*? Do you read it?'

'Well . . . as a matter of fack, I do. Why?'

'Ever studied it? Ever had a good butcher's at the front page? Ever noticed anything about the front page?'

'Can't say as I have,' the driver answered suspiciously. 'Should I of?'

'Have you ever seen the front page blank?'

'Blank? 'Ere: what is this? Why should it a bin blank?'

'I said, "Have you ever seen it blank?" Blank. Can't you understand English? Blank. Empty. With nothing on it. . . .'

'With nothing on it? Nothing at all?'

'Nothing.' Just a blank white sheet, with only the words *Daily Trumpet*. Oh, yes, and the date. But that's all. Blank. Ever seen that?'

The driver scratched his ginger poll. His small eyes were very troubled as he said, 'No. Can't say as I have. I expect I'd noticed it if I'd ever seen it. Do it happen often, like?'

The reporter pointed to the gear-lever.

'Listen, chum: by superhuman efforts on the part of generations of news editors and poor bloody blokes like me, it has never happened yet. Got it? But if you don't put this Rolls Phantom Twelve into gear, and get a move on for Rowcester, you'll see a blank front page all right tomorrow. Go on . . . get a move on! Don't you know it's a penal offence to obstruct the Press in the execution of its duties?'

'But, look 'ere, I ain't going to Rowcester! It's *miles* out me way. The gov'd chew me k——s off, if I was to oblige you!'

'Look, chum,' said the reporter patiently, 'what do you think of the Bishop sending a lot of flat-foots along to desecrate

your parish church by tearing down Mrs. Hammond's tablet from the wall?

'Or are you all in favour? If you are, I'll get out and walk. . . .'

'Ere! 'Oo said I was in favour? I know what I'd like to do to that bloody conchy bastard of a Bishop. I'm chapel meself, but I like the Rector; and I reckon that Bishop wants 'anging. . . . 'Oo give you the right,' the driver asked belligerently, 'to assume I was in favour? You wanna watch out, chum!'

The delighted reporter said, 'Well . . . I'll let you into a secret! I've seen Mrs. Hammond. I've seen Mr. Chrimes—(he's looking after the tablet for the moment).'

'I know . . . I drove it there. . . .'

'(My God! Another bit of news handed to me on a plate!) Well: I tell you, I've seen Mr. Chrimes, and the Rector, and now—with your generous assistance—I'm off to see the Bishop. . . .'

'Can't you take the bus? Honest, ole man, I don't see as how . . .'

'Listen, chum! Do you or do you *not* want to see this precious conchy Bishop of yours made to look the biggest bloody fool ever? Do you?'

A grin spread slowly over the rustic's face. He said, 'I wouldn't mind. . . .'

'Then, friend: release that brake, put that gear-lever in its right position, release the clutch, and drive headlong for the Bishop's Palace. Know where it is?'

'Yuh. I know it. Mind telling me what it's all about?'

The reporter obligingly whiled away the tedium of the journey by telling the story that he wished to be in the possession of every inhabitant of Rowcester and the surrounding parts by the next morning—at the latest.

'Good afternoon!' said the Bishop, putting out a thin, white, cold hand on which a large episcopal ring twinkled. 'My secretary said that you had a message from Mr. Dollblatz. . . .' His tufted eyebrows made inquiry.

'She must have got it wrong,' said the reporter, taking the proffered hand, and shaking it without enthusiasm. 'People do get things wrong,' he added cheerfully. 'Still, no harm done. . . .'

'But I . . . But you are not from Mr. Dollblatz? Dear me! Then who *are* you?'

'I represent the *Daily Trumpet*, and I just want to ask you some questions, Your Lordship! Mind if I take a pew?'

'Mind if you take a pew?' said the Bishop angrily. 'I'll thank you to take yourself off at once! Please be good enough to leave immediately!'

'Why?'

'Why?'

'Yes . . . why? What have you got to hide that you fly off the handle just at the very mention of my paper?'

'I never grant interviews to the Press,' said the Bishop, mastering his anger (though, as the reporter saw, not without some effort).

'You granted one to the representative of that Russian paper all right. . . .'

'Look here, sir,' said the Bishop, now openly angry; 'what do you mean by coming here, and getting in to see me on false pretences. . . .'

'Here! Who said I got in on false pretences?'

'You said that you had a message from Mr. Dollblatz. Isn't that what you'd call false pretences?'

'Pardon me, Your Lordship! I said that I had a message about Mr. Dollblatz. I can't help it, can I, if your secretary forgot to wash her ears?'

'Don't be so insufferably vulgar! What is this message?'

'Don't you want to know what I'm here for, first?'

'Well'—contemptuously—'what are you here for?'

'To ask a question. One or two questions, to be precise.'

'I shall answer nothing. I not only disapprove of your entire attitude; I disapprove most strongly of the paper that you represent. It's an obscene publication that should have been suppressed years ago. So now you know what I think of you and your paper!'

'I had a fair idea before I set foot in this room,' said the reporter, in no way abashed. 'All the same, I'll get an answer, if I have to stay here all night to get it.'

The Bishop said furiously, 'I'll have the police to throw you out! I *cannot* believe that your employers would countenance such behaviour as this of yours! I've a good mind to ring up your employer. Who is he? (Though, never mind, I can find out without your help!).'

'Oh, I don't mind telling you. It's Lord Baverstock. Mayfair 004277. There's a 'phone. Ring him. Tell him that I just wanted to know why you ordered the police to pull down that

tablet of Mrs. Hammond's from the wall of Hasling Parish Church. . . .'

The Bishop stared at the reporter. His Lordship's eyes were very cold.

'That,' he said, slowly and distinctly, 'is a purely domestic matter. It concerns no one but myself and the Rector of Hasling: Mr. Cartwright. It is a matter only of internal discipline: diocesan discipline. It can have no possible interest for you—or for the readers of your newspaper. Would you mind leaving, please? I take it that, since that was the question you came to ask, you will admit that you have your answer?'

'An answer that isn't quite what I wanted, sir.'

'Oh . . . And since when have you arrogated to yourself the right to dictate my answers to me?'

'I'm not dictating your answers, sir. I'm merely going to point out that, when you say the business of refusing to let Mrs. Hammond's tablet go up is a matter only for you and the Rector, you're wrong, Your Lordship. It's a matter for the whole world. Look here, sir: if you think that you're running a private church, just for the benefit of your own . . . your own . . .'

'Yes, Mr. Reporter: my own what?'

'Well, sir . . . What I was saying: what you do as a Bishop isn't a matter just for yourself. It concerns every one of us.'

'I see . . . Would you mind if I asked you just how it concerned *you*? You yourself?'

The reporter answered, with more assurance than he felt:

'Nothing that goes on in a Church—I mean the whole organization, not just one church building—is a matter only for the people *in* the Church. It's a matter of national interest.'

'Why?'

'Well . . . Well . . . it just is, that's all.'

The Bishop smiled.

'I'm afraid that I should want a better reason than that. In short, my dear young man, you have been sent to pry into matters of Church discipline (they are no more, I assure you), and you haven't even bothered to think up a plausible reason why I should gratify the vulgar inquisitiveness of yourself and your employers.'

'I have a perfect right to ask, Your Lordship.'

'Have you? Maybe. And I have the perfect right—as you express it—to decline to answer. You seem a very young man; so I must make allowances for your brashness, I suppose. But

what would you think if I claimed the right to interfere with the conduct of your newspaper? Surely even you must admit that there are matters of internal discipline which affect only your employers' relations with the staff? There must be certain standards of discipline—even in these days of trade unions? I imagine,' he continued, confident that he had regained the initiative in the handling of this situation, 'that a newspaper must call—in its running—for very high standards of internal discipline. I imagine that any go-as-you-please system would very soon bring about positive anarchy. Don't you have to give an account of yourself to your—what is he?—your editor? Can you do just as you please? Why don't you answer? Or have you no answer?'

'I'll answer when Your Lordship's finished,' said the reporter.

'I have finished. What have you to say?'

'Only this. I went this afternoon to have a look at the tablet you ordered the police to remove from Hasling Church. . . .'

'Oh, that tablet again. . . ! Dear me: I thought we'd finished with that. . . .'

'Your Lordship was mistaken,' said the reporter, grimly. 'I've only just begun. I *said* I'd seen the tablet. Yes: and seen what was carved on it. And now I want to know: what was wrong with the inscription?'

'Who said that there was anything wrong?' the Bishop asked quickly—toó quickly. 'You take a great deal upon yourself, young man!'

'Then why was it pulled down?'

'It was not "pulled down"—as you express it. It was removed with the very greatest care. You say that you saw it yourself, only this afternoon. Did you see any signs of damage? It was most carefully removed. I gave special instructions to that effect. I am certainly no vandal. . . .'

'But why did you order it to be removed in the first place? That's what I want to know. . . .'

'I had it removed because Mr. Cartwright, the Rector of Hasling, did not ask my permission. He ignored the fact that my permission is necessary in such cases. I . . . well: I ordered its removal.'

'Did you warn him? Did you give him a chance to take it down himself, without having all the fuss of the police coming along?'

'I don't see that I should have to answer that. That really is

a matter for Mr. Cartwright and myself. Have you interviewed Mr. Cartwright, by the way? You have? And what did he tell you?"

"It's all down here," said the reporter, tapping his pocket. "I'm interested, sir, in what you said to Mr. Cartwright, not what Mr. Cartwright might or might not have said to me. Did you warn Mr. Cartwright? Give him a chance to do things quietly?"

The Bishop hesitated. Then he said, with a sigh, "Yes. I see no harm in telling you that. Now . . ."

"No, sir. That certainly puts a different complexion on it. . . ."

"Thank you!"—most ironically.

"But it still doesn't answer my question: Why did you object to the tablet at all? Tell me, sir: granted you had the right to order the tablet's removal. . . ."

"All perfectly legal, I assure you."

"I wasn't arguing that. But, granted you had the power to object to Mrs. Hammond's tablet—and used that power (perfectly legally, as you point out)—would you have allowed the tablet to go up, *if* Mr. Cartwright had asked your permission?"

The Bishop looked out of the window.

"This seems very much beside the point, young man."

"Not to me it doesn't," said the reporter, aggressively. "Something's just occurred to me: did Mr. Cartwright just defy you altogether . . . or did he ask your permission *at all*? I mean: did he put the tablet up after you'd refused to allow it; or did he just ignore the fact that your permission was required? Do you mean to say," the reporter asked, as the Bishop continued silent, "that Mr. Cartwright didn't even make formal application to put up such-and-such a tablet? Just erected it, and then waited for your policemen to pull it down?"

The Bishop said reluctantly, "He did make an application in the beginning. . . ."

"Oh! And you refused? Why? Church walls too small? Squadron-Leader Hammond not important enough to have his tablet alongside of Lord Muckamuck?"

"How dare you, you little guttersnipe! Must I get the police to you! Will you be off!"

"No, I won't. And it'd take more than a couple of coppers to put me out, sir! I'm not some yokel. You'd better answer my questions. It'll be easier. . . ."

"You threaten now!"

'Why not? You threatened Mr. Cartwright. It must be catching.'

'I am Mr. Cartwright's ecclesiastical superior.'

'Well, then, if it wasn't just snobbishness that got Mrs. Hammond's tablet on the black-list, what did? What was carved on it?'

The Bishop decided to say yes.

The reporter said, 'What was wrong with it? Wasn't it true?'

'Wasn't *what* true?'

'That Squadron-Leader Hammond was killed—"murdered" was the word Mrs. Hammond used—by a German bomber dropping his load on an unprotected village, and killing a whole lot of schoolchildren as well? I seem to remember that, funnily enough. Wasn't it true?'

'I have no reason to doubt it.'

'Then what's the trouble? Was there anything on that tablet which was false? Wasn't this Hammond a squadron-leader at all? Do you mean to say he was a phoney?'

Had the Bishop been asked to look through a microscope at the germ of some particularly revolting disease, his face could not have assumed a look more disgusted than that which it was now wearing as he gazed at the reporter.

'How dare you suggest such things?' he asked. 'I have never hinted at such a thing. I believe Mr. Hammond attained the rank that the tablet says. There was nothing false in the statements carved on the stone. But . . .'

'Ah! But *what*? Look here, sir: I'll get it out of you, for all your hedging. There was *something* you didn't like on that tablet, wasn't there? I *know* there was. What was it?'

'Why should there have been? And what has it to do with you?'

The reporter had taken out his notebook, and was now rapidly turning the pages. He said, eyes on the pages, 'I've copied down the inscription. Hm . . . Ah-ha . . .' He looked up. 'It wouldn't be the word "murdered", would it? So. . . I was right! It was the use of that word. . . .'

The Bishop said angrily:

'A most improper use of the word! I told Mr. Cartwright so. I couldn't have allowed such a thing to be erected. . . . Monstrous!'

'But Mr. Hammond was murdered. Along with the children. What's wrong with the truth?'

'What's wrong with the truth, young man? What's wrong,

then, with perpetuating hatred, malice, all uncharitableness? What's wrong with carving the facts of our temporary emotions in everlasting stone, and bequeathing a legacy of hate to future generations? Is that good?"

"Well, they did it, didn't they?"

"Forgive me, please! I don't quite understand. Who did what?"

"Well, the Nazis did murder a whole lot of innocent children? Why should you stick up for them, if Mrs. Hammond likes to carve that fact on her husband's memorial? After all, she's got some interest in the fact, hasn't she? She was the one who lost a good husband, and was left a widow. What's wrong with telling the truth for a bit? Mrs. Hammond isn't a politician, who has to learn that, unless you make it up as soon as possible with your enemies, you can't eat a banquet with them. The German High Commissioner or whatever they call him isn't going to ask Mrs. Hammond to dinner at the Savoy. So why shouldn't she call his fellow-countrymen by their proper name: which is plain "murderer"?"

"Does it occur to you, young man," the Bishop asked wearily, "that the dropping of those bombs might have been—unintentional?"

"If it occurred to me, I'd think about having my brains tested. You'll be suggesting next that the gas-chambers at Auschwitz were built for central-heating, and that about ten million Jews somehow got cooked alive in them by mistake. Unintentionally: wasn't that the word you used?"

"That's a different matter. But it is quite possible that the bombs were dropped by error. Could you admit just the possibility?"

"Perhaps. . . ."

"That's better. So . . . while that is a possibility, how could I permit it to be stated as an incontrovertible fact that the bombs had been dropped deliberately—yes, and deliberately for the purpose of killing not only Mr. Hammond but all those little children as well? For that, young man, is what is implied in calling the aviator a "murderer". There is no other interpretation to be put on the word. Murder, as you know, is the deliberate taking of human life, by someone in the full possession of his or her mental and moral faculties, and—as the law expresses it—of malice aforethought. Do you honestly believe that the German airman set out deliberately, with malice aforethought, to kill those children? If you cannot honestly

believe that, then you may admit my wisdom in refusing to allow Mrs. Hammond to perpetuate what, at best, is only a supposition?"

'It's easy enough,' said the reporter, 'to be great-hearted about someone else's troubles. If a thing doesn't touch you personally, it's only human to think it's nothing. (Though I don't suppose that's an original thought. . . .)'

'No. Shakespeare certainly said something of the sort. . . .'

'Maybe. But you can't expect Mrs. Hammond to look at losing her husband in the same sort of way that you—or I, if it comes to that—can look at it. Can you?'

'Can I expect her to look at her husband's death in a detached manner? No . . . o . . . Perhaps not. . . .'

'You don't seem very sure about it,' the reporter said sarcastically. 'What's so difficult about understanding that Mrs. Hammond may have some rather personal views on the matter of her husband's death? What's so hard to understand about it?'

'There's nothing hard to understand. That wasn't what I meant. But you seem to hold the view, not only that her personal bitterness is quite natural—and so it is—but that it is inevitable—and there I differ from you. Even if it be quite comprehensible that Mrs. Hammond, poor lady, should know such intense bitterness, it is not necessary that she should. Not *at all* necessary. . . .'

The reporter took no care to hide his contemptuous misbelief.

'Well . . . for goodness' sake! What do you think she is: a stuffed dummy? She's got a heart in her, hasn't she? What do you expect her to do with it? Stifle it?'

The Bishop said quietly:

'She also has a mind. God gave her that at the same time that He gave her a heart, young man. And'—putting up his hand to forestall the instant objection—'what you (no, please let me finish! and then you can say what you wish)—what you must remember is, that what you call her "heart" is—or may be, rather—a mere temporary manifestation of the emotional side of her. That may well pass sooner than you think. Her mind, in any case, will outlast even the deepest of her emotions—even if nothing but the patience of old age comes to heal her spiritual wounds.'

'I can't see Mrs. Hammond forgetting so easily,' the reporter said, doggedly hanging on to his fixed idea. 'I talked to her

this morning, don't forget. I didn't see many signs that she'd forgotten—or forgiven.'

'I'm distressed to hear it. It isn't necessary to forget; but it is essential to forgive. Essential.'

'Mrs. Hammond's just an ordinary lady. You,' said the reporter, with angry contempt, 'expect people to act like saints.'

The Bishop said mildly:

'But we respect the saints only because they were, with all their sainthood, ordinary people. They wouldn't have been noteworthy had they not been of the same stuff as ourselves. *They* learnt how to forgive, as Our Saviour taught them. We must learn, too. Otherwise there is nothing for us but ruin—ruin here, and damnation in the hereafter. That's as certain as that I'm talking to you.'

'It's beyond me,' said the reporter, with what may be described only as a sort of cheerful indignation. He shrugged his shoulders, staring at the Bishop in a manner that that earnest man strove to find no cause for resentment. 'Well . . . I guess you *have* to talk like this! Me: I'm just an ordinary sort of person—thank goodness!—and I take things as I find them. I don't go complicating things, for the *sake* of complicating. I know what I'd feel, if the Nazis had killed someone as near to me as Mrs. Hammond's husband was to her. I know what I'd feel like saying to someone who said to me, "Oh, it'll all be the same in a hundred years' time!" I'd say, "Yeah: but what about now?" Tell me, Your Lordship: something you said just now . . . about forgiving. . . .'

'Yes?'

'You said it was wrong to carry on the emotions of today into tomorrow. . . .'

'I said something of that sort, yes.'

The reporter said, with a noticeably cross-questioning air, which made the Bishop sigh:

'Then . . . then you think it's wrong to make it so those emotions are . . . well, carried forward? Yes? And that's why you forbade Mrs. Hammond's tablet to go up: because the wording on it sort of conveyed an idea that, if it wasn't exactly wrong for today, it would take the wrong sort of sentiment into the future? Would have the wrong sort of effect on future generations?'

'Certainly. That sums it up very well.'

'And Mrs. Hammond, not quite seeing things that way,' the

reporter continued, with the air of making his point, 'has to be shown what's good for her . . . eh?'

The Bishop said gently (and, it must be admitted, warily), 'Good for her . . . and good for others. . . .'

'By force?'

The Bishop sighed.

'The word "force" has a significance for you which prevents your examining the idea of compulsion objectively. . . .'

'Excuse me?'

'I said you were too prejudiced against what you think of as "force" to be able to examine this so-called "force" with a clear mind. At least, I'm afraid that that's so. . . .'

'I know something about force,' said the reporter, stoutly. 'It means just ordering someone else to do what you want. That's all there is in it.'

'No, my boy,' said the Bishop quietly, 'there is very much more than that in it. And, in using what you call "force"—but what I call my authority—I was actuated by no prejudice against Mrs. Hammond or Mr. Cartwright or, indeed, against any of the things that they hold worthy, and I think are misunderstood. I had a duty . . . and I carried it out. The fact that carrying it out may have made me unpopular with some people—yourself, for instance—will not affect my intention of doing my duty in future. I have never angled for popularity: at least, not at the expense of my duty.'

'We had an idea,' said the reporter, slowly, 'that what riled you about the tablet was the fact that it held up an Englishman to have done something good; and ran down foreigners. Can you tell me what strange law of nature it is which makes anything any Englishman does bad, and anything any foreigner does okay?'

'I can't, because it is not true. Nor do I think so.'

'But half your colleagues on this *Christian Force* movement of yours are foreigners.'

'And what is so extraordinary about that? We have striven to make it an international body. How could we strive for peace, and keep membership a privilege only of Englishmen? The whole idea is ludicrous. Ours is an international body. Wars break out, young man, between peoples, not between families. We wish our membership to be as all-embracing as possible.'

'But all idealists. . . .'

'You sneer, I see. But what is there in idealism which excites your contempt?'

'It doesn't. *True* idealism. But I don't call it idealism which sits back and lets the other chap do the dirty work; takes all the advantages of other people's self-sacrifice; and then justifies the fact that it didn't muck in when there was some dirty work to be done, by abusing the poor devils who had to do the work. You talk of duty, Your Lordship: but what would have happened to Mr. Hammond—he was a volunteer, actually; but suppose he hadn't been?—if he'd said he wasn't going to fight for his wife, for his neighbours, for his country—yes, if you want the plain facts: for you and Mr. Dollblatz? (Another idealist!)

'Oh . . . dear. And what has Mr. Dollblatz done, not to earn your approval? I'm afraid you're a young man with very fixed views.'

'You're right, sir! And, what's more, I'm going to hang on to them until I see a reason for changing them.'

The Bishop smiled tolerantly.

'Time will do that.'

'Will it convince me that Mr. Dollblatz, the reformed Communist, has the interests of the human race at heart more than the late Squadron-Leader Hammond had? If time does that for me, it'll be working a miracle!'

The Bishop said curiously, 'Tell me: why shouldn't Mr. Dollblatz be an idealist? What makes you so certain that he isn't?'

'I could ask you: What makes you so certain he *is*? What proof has he given of idealism? He made a packet out of preaching Communism—and then fell over himself saying that he'd only let other people air their views. That he was just a Liberal, who believed in free speech . . . which, Your Lordship, is something you're not so keen on?'

'How so?'—very frigidly.

'Well, you were pretty quick on subbing Mrs. Hammond's copy on the tombstone, weren't you? And when she wouldn't—or couldn't—do a re-write, you promptly spiked it for good and all? Did Mr. Dollblatz have any say in telling Mrs. Hammond she ought to change her views on what her husband did?'

'I told you that the matter of Mrs. Hammond's memorial tablet was a purely domestic matter—a matter of internal Church discipline. I repeat that it has nothing at all to do with outsiders.'

'And I repeat that it has everything to do with people who still like their own country run by their own people; and not

by a lot of foreign busybodies—if they're nothing worse. Anyway, I'd rather be related to Squadron-Leader Hammond than to Mr. Dollblatz; and that's the truth!

'I expect you would—at your age. But I should still like to know what Mr. Dollblatz has done to earn your personal dislike? Has he ever done anything to you?'

'And why has he earned your admiration, Your Lordship? His idealism? His work for peace? Tell me: would you go bail for him?'

'Go bail? I . . . Oh, you mean that in a figurative sense. You mean, would I repose my fullest confidence in him?'

'No, I don't mean that figuratively. I mean it actually. I mean, when the Bow Street magistrate asks him to put up so much bail, will you go surety? Will you?'

The Bishop said angrily, 'Have you been drinking? I know that you reporters make a boast of your intemperance. Have you been drinking?'

'I've had a few pints at *The Dunmow Flitch* at Hasling; and I expect I'll down a few more before I go to bed. But what's that got to do with anything? I'm certainly not tight, if that's what you're implying.'

'Then your offensiveness hasn't even that excuse! What on earth do you mean by all this talk of Mr. Dollblatz's needing bail? Bail for what? You have to be charged with some criminal offence to need bail. I never heard such nonsense in my life! Of what criminal offence has Mr. Dollblatz been guilty?'

'Plenty, I should think,' said the reporter, cheerfully, seeing that he had shaken the Bishop's aplomb. 'But that's only my opinion.'

The Bishop said slowly, menacingly, 'What would your editor say if he knew that you conducted yourself in this disgracefully vulgar fashion? I've a very good mind to report you.'

'Do. It'd make him laugh. But don't you want to know why I asked you if you'd go bail for Dollblatz? Don't tell me,' he jeered, 'that you're above ordinary common curiosity? I'd want to know, if I were you. Don't you want to know?'

'Very well, then. What is this absurd story? I see that you're determined to tell me. Why should I have to go bail for Mr. Dollblatz?'

'I didn't say you *should*. I said you *could*, if you liked. But, if you do want to, you'll have your chance tomorrow morning—at Bow Street.'

'*Bow Street!* What on earth . . . There must be some mistake!

Why on earth should he have to appear at Bow Street? What do they say he's done?

'They say he's been doing a bit of currency fiddling, if Your Lordship understands that term. But'—airily—'you can read all about it in this evening's papers. I expect the news has got down even to here by now!'

The Bishop nodded. He said, 'Very well. That must have given you great pleasure—to tell me that. . . .'

The reporter said vindictively, 'Are you trying to make me feel guilty? All right, then: yes! Yes, I'm very glad that *one* phoney will be shown up. And, as for the pleasure it gives me, I reckon it's just about the same pleasure you got when you made Mrs. Hammond look a fool. I expect you've heard the old saying about tit-for-tat? I reckon this is it.

'Good-bye, Your Lordship. There's one thing I can promise: *Christian Forcé* is going to get all the publicity I can give it.'

The Bishop said, 'You haven't asked me yet; but you may say that, if it is needed, I will go bail for my colleague. . . . Good-bye, young man. You have a long way to go before you will be able to see things as they truly are. I am sorry for you. . . .'

'Save it for your friends,' said the reporter, as he opened the door.

'It's a dangerous game,' said the News Editor, on the principle that even the most promising—particularly the most promising—of young reporters should be taken down a peg whenever the opportunity offered; 'it's a dangerous game to give Bigwigs lip.'

'But there was no one there. It's only his word against mine that I wasn't as polite as though I'd been interviewing the Queen. What can he say, anyway?'

'Don't be daft! He can say a lot; and, as for that b——s about his word against yours, do you think the word of a bishop of the third oldest see in Britain won't count for more than the word of a *Trumpet* reporter? Wake up, kid! And there's another thing: these cunning so-and-so's are up to all sorts of dodges to get us in wrong. How d'you know he hadn't a magnetic tape-recorder rigged up? I can just see one of our rivals getting hold of that tape and reproducing your interview. Why, we'd have the Press Council and Gawd knows what down on us! Seriously: you simply can't go chucking

your weight about like that. It isn't worth the risk. What'd he have to say about—when you told him about Dollblatz?’

‘Floored him. You’d have laughed.’

‘Would I? I’ll wait a bit, if you don’t mind, and see whether it’s safe to laugh just yet. I’m keeping me fingers crossed in the meanwhile. Still’—grudgingly—‘I suppose you got more out of him by riling him than you would if you’d buttered him up. You could have done worse. What did you get?’

‘Everything! I reckon I’ve got enough now to spill the whole story. Only thing . . .’

‘Only thing, you haven’t got any pix, have you? Tell us: any sniff of a rival prowling around? Trouble here is that, soon as that story of Dollblatz breaks—and it *has* broken already—it’s a cast-iron cert someone will hop along for an interview with His Lordship; and the matter of Mrs. Hammond may slip out. Slice of jam you got in first. Problem now: how we going to maintain our lead?’

‘Shall I get back, then?’

‘Hang on a moment. I’m thinking. No . . . Look: tell you what. I’ll switch you through to Telephone Reporters, and you give ’em the dope. Where you going to be now? Can you find some place, and stay there until I ring you back?’

‘There’s a place I saw on my way here, called the *Fleur de Lys*: looks all right. I don’t know what time they open here; but it’s an hotel. I can sit in the lounge and drink a coffee. Come to that, I could book in.’

‘Listen, you! I’m not interested in your arrangements for getting a drink out of hours—or in them, come to that. Go to the *Fleur de Lys*—usual spelling?—okay—and wait there. If you have to leave for any reason, leave a number. ’Phone the story through now, when I switch you through; and I’ll let you know later about the arrangements for the pix. I’d better get a man down to you straight away.’

‘That would be better, I think.’

‘Yes. Now . . . another thing: and I want a plain answer to this. No sprucing, mind! Assuming that the Bishop hates your guts, as only a professional peace-lover can, is there anybody else whose corns you’ve trodden on in the quest for truth? Now, come on! This is too important for dodging. Is there any single house you can go back to, and expect to be received with open arms? The truth now?’

‘Every one!’

‘Fair do’s? All right. I believe you! Good. ’Cause I’ve got

a hunch this is going to be Big, if we handle it right. It's got everything. Or . . . wait! *Has* it got everything? What's Mrs. H. like to look at?"

'A smasher! Bit on the tall side, but looks like something out of *Vogue*. She's . . .'

'Well, I'll get Ernie Bateman on the pix. He'll know how to photograph her so she *doesn't* look like something out of *Vogue*. We want the women of Britain to learn to love her, not to hate her. But that doesn't concern you. She's all right, eh? Gooood! Then this story *has* everything, like I thought. Dead hero, young and beautiful widow. Sacrifice: she saves up the dough to buy him a tombstone. Gallant ex-colonel parson, the sort that they have in stories in women's magazines, takes the widow's side—putting him in direct conflict with his bishop. Bishop is in league with a sinister character name of Dollblatz, suspected of being undercover man for the Reds. Police hack down the widow's tombstone. Colonel-parson denounces the Red agent from the pulpit.

'And *you*, my lad, are either going to bring those two together, or you can come back! Now . . . are you up to it? Do you feel you can do it?"

'Gosh, yes! Yeah . . . I know I can. Just give me the chance! I promise you I won't fall down on the job!"

'All right. I will. And you may—I said you *may*—get a by-line if you handle this the way it ought to be handled. Now get your story 'phoned through; and wait in *Fleur de Lys* for me to give you further orders. Cheer-oh!"

'Cheer-oh!' the reporter said, respectfully and gratefully. As he laid the hand microphone back in its cradle, he whispered: 'What a *smashing* good sort Ole Pikey is! What a *smashing* good bloke to work for. . . !' His chest swelled. This was his Big Chance. But . . . it was more of Ole Pikey that he was thinking. It was Pikey who was giving him this chance. Let Pikey down, and it'd be Ole Pikey who'd have to carry the can. What a *smashing* bloke. . . !

'I won't let you down, Pikey Boy!' the reporter whispered reverently, gazing at the instrument which, but a few seconds before, had carried the sounds of Ole Pikey's voice.

On the morning next-but-one, Mrs. Stevens came breathlessly into Phyllida's room, without having troubled to comb her hair.

In her hand she held a copy of the *Daily Trumpet*; and on her face was a look which said This-Is-The-End-Of-Everything!

'Oh, Phyll! . . . Have you seen this?'

The old lady thrust the newspaper into her daughter's hands, sat down on the edge of the bed, and burst into tears.

'Oh, the shame of it! The shame of it!' Mrs. Stevens sobbed, rocking her body backwards and forwards, and making the bed creak in a manner that Phyllida—never at her most patient in the minutes immediately after having been awakened—found singularly irritating.

'Oh, Mother! What on earth is it?' Then Phyllida glanced at the 72-point banner headline over the picture on the front page; and realized why Mrs. Stevens was so troubled. 'Oh . . . Oh, dear. . . .'

'It was that awful young man who came to see you the day before yesterday!'

'So I see,' said Phyllida, grimly, studying the front page as it were in gingerly experimental glances; rather as a nervous bather tries the water with the tips of his toes. 'Oh, Mother: must you?'

'I've never been in the papers in my *life*!' Mrs. Stevens wailed.

Phyllida took a deep breath. She said, 'Mother. At least we aren't in the papers for having *murdered* someone. . . .'

'Oh, Phyll! How *can* you! The shame of it. . . .'

Phyllida forced herself to read what Ole Pikey and the reporter, with Ernie Bateman's art-work to assist them, had cooked up for the day's emotional attack on the *Trumpet's* five million readers.

At the first glance Phyllida felt like fainting; at the second she felt only like being sick. By the time that she had forced herself to study the front page as though it might have concerned someone of whom she had never heard, she found—a little to her astonishment—that the sense of shock was wearing off. She forced herself then to read and read again; to study the picture of herself—taken as she was coming out of the bank—and to find some comfort (it was surprising how much comfort could be found!) in the fact that, for a snap, the picture was really most flattering. What a blessing that she had been wearing her Donegal again!

The headline, though, was a bit scaring. Not so much the actual words, perhaps, as the menacing size of the letters—the dense blackness of them. (Phyllida could not remember ever to

have seen such big, such black letters used before, save for some particularly revolting crime. Christie, she remembered, with a shudder, had earned this sort of type.)

'What you were thinking of,' said Mrs. Stevens, 'to allow yourself to be pumped by that horrible, common young man who called here, I simply don't *know*! How you *could*!'

'Yes,' said Phyllida, musingly, staring at the scare headlines; 'I've wondered about that myself. I suppose it was his professional cunning, calling before I'd had a chance to wake up. . . .'

Mrs. Stevens said reproachfully, 'Wait till you've read it *all*! There isn't a *thing* they haven't got!' (All the same, Phyllida thought, Mother's *still* more excited than shocked.) 'Not a thing,' the old lady added, with a sort of gloomy relish; but Phyllida noticed, with some amusement, that her mother's tears had dried up. 'Have you seen it? I mean: *seen* it? Not only *you and I*; but the *house*, even; and Mr. *Cartwright* and the *Bishop*! Why, they've even got Fred Shipton and Dick Waite—but on another page. . . .'

'Yes,' said Phyllida meekly, 'I can see whom they've got. . . .'

'And they've even got Philip. . . .'

'Yes,' said Phyllida; 'they've even got *Philip*.'

Then the telephone rang.

It was the critic. Phyllida, holding the hand microphone well away from an ear which had not yet hardened itself to the clamour of the day, said:

'Yes. Yes . . . it's in front of me. No, I haven't looked at it properly yet. Mother says there's some more inside.' She turned the pages of the newspaper with one hand. 'Where . . . Page six? Oh . . .'

The critic said excitedly, 'But *how* they must have scuttled round! Oh, dear: did you *know* this was going to happen?'

'I hadn't an idea. Oh, I know what you're going to say. But I suppose . . . I don't know . . . I just saw the reporter, and he asked me one or two questions about Philip. About the memorial tablet, really, and . . . I don't know at all. . . .'

'Well, your "one or two questions" seem to have been elaborated, my dear, into quite a *dossier*! Still . . . I mustn't blame you. If you aren't used to reporters, you can say a *great deal* more than you can ever quite believe you said. I suppose you . . . Well: they've certainly done us proud!'

'*Us* . . . Are you in it?'

The critic laughed.

'I mean the book. Good heavens! Don't you see that this is the most marvellous publicity! It's no good my ringing up until ten; but I'm getting on to the publishers straight away to get them to *rush* things!'

Phyllida said, 'Must I look at it like that?'

'As though it's the best thing that's happened? Well . . . it would be the best thing to do in any case, wouldn't it? But you could take comfort in the thought that the only thing you are really objecting to is the vulgar way in which you've had to hit the headlines. But that's the way the *Trumpet* does things. And if you can remember that—that it's only in the *manner* of presentation that the whole thing's so vulgar—you shouldn't mind so much. Though I admit it is always rather a shock to see oneself in the papers at all—even when they've got something rather wonderful to say about you. Heavens! How we realize that we prize our privacy, the moment it's snatched away from us!'

'I didn't think,' said Phyllida, with a sour little smile, 'I'd ever hear *you* say that!'

'Naughty, naughty! But I can be quite a shrinking violet—when I'm not professionally advertising myself. I suppose you think this is the most awful thing that's ever happened?'

'Mother does,' said Phyllida, with a glance at Mrs. Stevens, who seemed to have recovered from an earlier distress, and was now reading page six with every sign, not only of interest, but of something like pleasure, too.

'Never mind about Mother! What about you? Do *you* think it's the most awful thing? Do you?'

Phyllida said slowly, 'I don't know. Yet. Perhaps it's only like diving into a cold sea. The shock's brutal; but it's gone so quickly. I . . . Yes, I think even these last few minutes have changed things a bit. . . .'

'Changed?'

'Well . . . that it doesn't seem quite so awful.'

'I'm glad. Because (now I'm going to tell you something) it's something you've got to get used to. And (I know you're going to laugh at this, and think I'm pulling your leg. But I'm not, I promise you!) I had exactly the same feeling—the same sense of shock—when I first saw my own photo in the paper. And *that*—if you please!—was over a simply wonderful review in the *Bystander*.

'I suppose,' he added, almost as though speaking to himself,

'that that may have had something to do with the fact that it was a simply frightful picture. But I remember the sense of shock right enough. It took me quite a *long* time to get it into my head that if I wanted to get on in the world, I'd have to put up with seeing my name mentioned—and seeing my picture, too. You got the bit about Dollblatz, didn't you? My goodness, when the *Trumpet* gets its teeth into something, it does *bite*! Do you know, I wouldn't be at *all* surprised if the *turning*—I mean, Dollblatz's being charged so very *handily* for the *Trumpet*—hadn't been *arranged* by the *Trumpet*. There's *nothing*,' he said, the note of admiration very apparent in his voice; 'there's simply *nothing* I'd put past the *Trumpet*—bless it! (By the way, it's such a relief to find you read it too! Everyone denies reading it, but everyone seems to have seen it, if you ever say, "Did you see that awful thing in the *Trumpet* this morning?" Such hypocrisy! I like the *Trumpet*. It's loud and vulgar—but it's *fun*. Don't you think so?)'

'Yes . . . I suppose so. I used to like it for the pictures. . . .'

'Oh, go on with you! You'll love this in a little while! You *know* you will!'

Phyllida said quietly, 'I can still remember that it's all because Philip was killed . . . and that Philip couldn't have his memorial put up in a church. . . .'

'I'm sorry. But even that . . . I wonder if you can realize that this is something he would have liked . . . and never had?'

'All right. Perhaps. But what is this about Dollblatz? Who's he? I seem to remember he made some Communist films or something. How is he connected with all this?'

'Oh . . . you haven't tumbled to it? Read page six. It's all there. But, briefly, Dollblatz and this precious Bishop of yours are buddies. Dollblatz is the founder of *Christian Force*, whose wonderful principles your Bishop was upholding when he refused to allow Philip's memorial to go up—or remain up. And now *dear, good* Mr. Dollblatz looks like having to pay about twenty thousand in fines and doing a six months' stretch for having used the international activities of *Christian Force* to shift some currency about Europe.

'You'd better read it. I'm not much good at high finance. It's hard enough for me to follow my royalty statements. But I can see that association with Mr. Dollblatz isn't going to do the Bishop much good. What are you doing for lunch? I tell you why I ask you: because every head in Hasling (I don't

want to frighten you; but a little of the truth is essential sometimes) is going to be framed between the Nottingham lace curtains as you go down the road. Yes . . . seriously. Are you feeling a little sick?’

‘I am, rather,’ said Phyllida, feeling more than a little sick.

‘I thought so. I am being cruel only to be kind. So what you’d better do is to ring up for a hire-car to collect you, and take you—not to Hasling, but—well, to the next station along the line.’

‘Fairfield . . .’

‘Fairfield? Well, you should know. Anyhow: do that; and meet me at a *wonderful* new place I’ve found. Only rather *plainer* than that Hungarian place. When shall I see you? There’s a simply divine old station hotel at Liverpool Street, all full of commercials and freemasons. Do you know it? It’s British Railways now; but they’ve kept all the antique charm. I’ll meet you there; and we can go on.’

‘Honestly, I’d . . .’

‘Now don’t be silly. The worst thing you can do is to stay in and *mope*. I loathe *moping*. I know you think I’m just an old Meddlesome Matty; but believe me, I know what’s best. Can you catch that train which gets in at just on twelve? Well . . . anyway: I shall expect you. Don’t be late! (Oh . . . and put on that Donegal. I thought the *Trumpet* photographer made you look rather fetching, all things considered.)’

He rang off.

Mrs. Stevens said:

‘Did *you* know Judkins was at the Relief of Mafeking? What they dig out, these papers! Here I’ve lived in Hasling for forty years, and I didn’t know that!’

The telephone rang.

‘You’ve seen the papers, of course?’ Alan Cartwright said.

‘I’ve seen the *Trumpet*. Is it in any of the others?’ Phyllida said.

‘I mean the *Trumpet*.’

‘Well, yes. We take the *Trumpet*, too.’

‘Ah . . .’

‘Were you going to say how sorry you were, Mr. Cartwright?’

After only the smallest pause, he said:

‘Only if you’d told me that this rather blatant publicity had wounded you: Has it? If so, then I am very sorry indeed.’

Phyllida said cautiously, 'I . . . I don't know, Mr. Cartwright. It's something about which I'm not too clear at the moment. When I first saw the paper, I was . . . well . . . rather shocked. Then a friend of mine . . . a writer who's bringing out an edition of Philip's poems . . . rang me. (Only a few moments ago. In fact, you rang just after he'd hung up.) I'm going to town, to have luncheon with him. He's . . . he's very level-headed; even if he doesn't seem to be—on the surface, I mean. I suppose you'd call him rather worldly. He . . . I think he might be the best person to see just at this moment. . . .'

'Yes, I should think so. I suppose he suggested you might find it easier not to be in Hasling just for the present?'

Phyllida smiled; and the smile sounded in her voice as she said:

'Well . . . I did tell you he was rather worldly. Yes: he did suggest something of the sort. Have you . . . have you been out yet?'

'Out? Oh . . . you mean, have I been outside the rectory? Yes . . . Yes, I have.'

'Did you . . . well: *are* people very interested?'

There was only the smallest hesitation before the Rector answered, with a somewhat apologetic little cough, 'Well . . . I thought they were, rather. Quite a lot of people stopped me, who have never even nodded to me before this; and one or two actually crossed the road to congratulate me. I have never been in the papers before—well, like this, I mean. I . . . found it distinctly embarrassing.'

'And you thought you'd warn me? That was nice of you, Mr. Cartwright. . . .'

'It's the least I could do. Tell me, are you alone?'

Phyllida said, without covering the mouthpiece of the microphone with her hand:

'Mother: would you like to take the bathroom first? Only, I shall have to buck up after this.'

Mrs. Stevens looked up, a little startled at being so abruptly withdrawn from the all-engrossing task of reading a newspaper which seemed to be devoted entirely to her daughter's affairs.

'Oh? Oh, yes . . . of course. Yes . . . I'd better go, then. I . . . I'll read the rest later,' she added, somewhat wistfully.

The door closed behind her; and Phyllida said, 'She burst into my room, sobbing. . . .'

'Oh, dear! I *am* sorry.'

'But I've never seen her so engrossed as she's been for the

past twenty minutes. She didn't even try to listen to what was being said at the other end of the line. . . .'

The Rector said hesitantly:

'I suppose there is nothing one can do; but'—a deep sigh—'I feel so curiously involved, now, in something which is outside my experience. I suppose I couldn't have done anything different from what I did do; and yet . . .'

'You're rather regretting it?'

'In a way. I must confess to the most awful cold feet. This is something I hadn't bargained for. . . . I hadn't remotely imagined . . .'

'Me, too. . . .'

'There's a frightening *inevitability* about it all. One wonders why one is selected, out of all the millions of people there are, to be the one whose one small action achieves the notoriety of publication in a newspaper. There's something of the lottery about it. Chance. Something catches the eye of some reporter in London, and inquiries are set afoot. The young chap from the *Trumpet* who came down here to interview me told me as much. There's no personal interest in it all, from beginning to end. They have no interest in us; they have no dislike of us; there isn't a scrap of malice anywhere. That's what's so frightening about it all. They neither know us nor care to know us. We are merely this day's raw material for the necessary news: what's going to fill the front page, just as news of lesser importance must be found—or made up—to fill the other pages. What is so impressive is their *power*. Good heavens! If the Church only had the power to catch, within a few minutes, the attention of a whole nation—of a whole world! Yesterday, a few people knew we existed, Mrs. Hammond: today ten, twenty millions, know our names, know what we do, what we have done, know where we live, know—at least, as far as you are concerned—what we wear. . . .'

'And will want to know more?' Phyllida said softly.

'Good lord, I hope not!'

'But you don't sound too hopeful! I suppose,' Phyllida said musingly, 'that it would be a good idea to run away?' She almost *heard* the silence of instant opposition; and she had pleasure in adding quickly, so that she could hear the Rector's sigh of happy disappointment: 'But I won't do so. Apart from Mother, there's . . . oh, well: it isn't as though we'd done anything *wrong*. . . .'

'No. Nothing wrong. There's only one thing, Mrs. Hammond. One thing I do—I admit—rather regret. Very *much* regret. . . .'

Phyllida could sense that he wished her to ask what that thing was. So that she said, encouragingly, sympathetically, 'Tell me, Mr. Cartwright. . . .'

'Well . . . Only this: I've possibly been a little pugnacious in my conflict with His Lordship. . . .'

'Oh, I wouldn't say that. . . .'

'I think you may, all the same.' She caught the rather bitter smile. 'I have: there's no getting away from it. I have been more of a St. Peter than a St. Sebastian. However . . . Apart from the *method*, I still think the principle has been sound. Even at the risk of seeming to disrupt Church discipline, I *had* to stand out against . . . well, what I know to be insincere, to say no more.'

'I'm sure you did. No one in Hasling doubts you, Mr. Cartwright.'

'It's nice to hear you say it. But I really do try. But . . .'

'But,' she said gently, 'that isn't what you were going to say.'

'Eh? Well, no . . . No, it wasn't . . . Not exactly.'

'What was it?' she encouraged him.

'Only this, Mrs. Hammond. I don't regret my having opposed my Bishop in matters which are outside theology or even Church discipline. But I do most profoundly regret that I couldn't have chosen another occasion. Another occasion altogether. One that didn't involve you. . . .'

Phyllida said slowly, 'That's . . . that's very nice of you, Mr. Cartwright. But . . . you needn't mind. Perhaps I needed something to . . . to bring me out a bit.' She smoothed out the newspaper on her lap with her free hand. Staring down at the dense black of the headlines, she said, 'Perhaps one can have too much privacy. At least'—she made the effort to speak lightly, for all the tears which had gathered in her eyes—'I'll have the chance of knowing what it's like to be famous.'

He said, 'Perhaps I'll see you when you return from London? I should like you to know you may count on me.'

'Yes . . . I will . . . ' said Phyllida, putting the receiver back into its cradle.

She lay for a few minutes, staring at the newspaper; but her eyes were fixed on other things: on things which were so far distant that she could not believe that they had ever formed a part of her every day. She sighed, and glanced at the clock.

She threw the covers back, and got out of bed.

The newspaper slid over the edge of the eiderdown quilt and sank to the floor. Her foot blotted out the headline:

SHAME ON THIS BISHOP!

The critic had said, 'I've had a lot of experience of newspapers—from the inside. That's the only side from which you can see how they work; get to know why they act the way they do. And I'll tell you this: what's going to happen this week—and, who knows?—the week after that, and the week after that, won't happen just because it'll happen; it'll happen because it *must* happen. All the inventiveness of the newspaper—of the "policy-planner", of the editor, of the reporter—all the seeming chance by which one bit of news comes up and something else never becomes news: all this takes place within the cast-iron inevitability of the newspaper pattern. I can tell you what will happen from this moment onwards. More: I can tell you what's going on now, in a hundred newspaper offices—London and provincial; home and foreign. In fact . . . I'll give you a near-enough-accurate programme for at least the next fortnight. Would you like to hear it?'

Well, it hadn't mattered very much, whether or not she'd wanted to hear it. The critic had told her, irrespective of what her wishes might have been.

But, as he had prophesied, so it had come about.

First, all the 'other' newspapers had come down to Hasling: which meant that the editors of all the newspapers which had not scooped the 'Hasling Story' had sent their reporters down to Hasling, to 'follow up'.

And, since it was manifestly impossible that they could do more than to squeeze more news out of the original story—which would always be a *Trumpet* story—they set about squeezing even the most unlikely sources of information.

By the third morning after the first appearance of the story, Phyllida had been given as it were a national classification; a typing for easy reference. Whatever she did, wherever she went—though all that she did was to buy half a pound of butter; and all that she visited was the bank—was reported in detail. And all references to her—invariably sympathetic, even by those newspapers whose 'policy' it had become to side

with the Bishop and oppose Mr. Cartwright's insubordination were to such type-figures as 'Tombstone Widow', 'Tombstone Wife', 'Tombstone Bride' (this was the most popular with the more 'popular' newspapers), 'Hero's Wife', 'Airman's Widow', or 'Ace's Bride'. 'Tombstone Wife' soon gained the advantage over 'Tombstone Widow' because, as the critic pointed out, 'wife' is two letters shorter than 'widow'.

'Mere accuracy of definition,' he said, 'isn't the most important thing. The really important thing—the really *vital* thing—is to give you an unambiguous name, even if it means getting you one at the cost of a certain ambiguity.'

There was nothing that she could do without seeing it reported in the next morning's newspapers.

On the morning of the fifth day after the 'breaking' of the story the *Trumpet* had this headline:

TCMB WIFE: DOCTOR CALLS

'Don't . . . *please* don't telephone!' the critic urged. 'It'll do not the *slightest* good. I do urge you not to. I really do understand these people. Oh . . . *please*!'

He had been right, of course; and she had been wrong not to listen to him.

For it had made no difference to 'policy', when she had said:

'I'm *not* ill. Can't you *possibly* just not pay quite so much attention to what—no, *not* what I'm doing—but what you *think* I'm doing? As a matter of fact, the gentleman who called on my mother—*not* on me—*is* a doctor. He's an old friend of my father's. He just called out of friendship: just a courtesy call.

'No one's ill in the house, as far as I know. . . . Though I'm sure we all shall be if you can't stop this horrible persecution. . . .'

The telephone reporter took it all down; and the chief reporter was most polite. *He* did not lose his temper. But the headlines, on the following morning, gave the world the information:

TOMB WIDOW: 'STOP THIS PERSECUTION!'

The reader, unless he had listened in to the conversation between Phyllida and the chief reporter, could not have guessed that the persecution complained of had anything to do with the *Trumpet*.

'Naturally,' said the critic. 'Though, if it were necessary,

they could still bring themselves to admit they were slowly driving you mad. Tell me . . . what are you going to do?' .

Trade was booming in Hasling. The village had never harboured so many transient and semi-permanent visitors since the advance guard of the Pilgrimage of Grace had commandeered billets for itself five hundred years before. Many of the journalists had had to station themselves at Staintree or Rowcester; but some of the earlier arrivals—they were mostly from London—had managed to find themselves lodgings in *The Flitch* or the other taverns; and Alf (of Alf's Pull-in Café) had fitted out a store-room as a dormitory big enough for six. There was no licence at Alf's; but that fact did not worry the reporters, who laid in a stock of liquor; and there was a telephone which, by arrangement, each of the six used in turn. They were not as comfortable as they might have been at *The Flitch*; but Alf's hours were pretty go-as-you-please, and there was a homely atmosphere at Alf's which would (they knew) have been lacking at a more strictly run establishment. Besides, Alf's was half a mile nearer to 'The Firs' than *The Flitch* was; and the west window of Alf's dining-room commanded a clear view of the main road, along which Phyllida, her mother, her friends or the daily, must come. All things considered, the six reporters whom fate had driven to Alf's thought that they could have done worse.

Every now and then, as any newspaperman will tell you, there comes a story which hits the headlines because it touches the World's Great Heart.

And this story of the Tombstone Widow was one of them.

For, as one news editor had said, right at the beginning of the story, it Had Everything; by which—had he paused to reflect—he meant that it had the twin Master Themes of Love and Death.

But it had more: along with Love and Death there was the ancient, eternally heart-warming theme of Power Defied: that theme which has made the story of David and Goliath one of the world's most memorable tales. And, really, it was this last theme, which is rare as compared with the other themes of Love and Death, which made the story of the Tombstone Widow last.

It was the critic whose keen, passionless sight first detected a truth not yet revealed even to the waiting journalists.

He said, less than a week after that first startling headline had brought Phyllida out of obscurity—not a long time, but

A time long enough to have made him wonder what was sustaining the newspapers' interest in Phyllida; and to have given him the answer:

'They're not down here any longer because of you, Phyllida.'

'No?' (But five of them had called only that morning. . . .)

'No. Oh, I grant you you're still part of the story. But they could drop you even now, and still have what they want. They don't want you any more, my child! You've served your purpose.'

'But they never stop asking me questions. Every day they write something more about me. Did you know that the foreign papers have arrived now? There was a man from that French paper, *Match*, here today. I wasn't in, but he left his card. What do you mean: they don't want me any more? I wish to God you were right! But I can tell you you're hopelessly wrong. . . .'

'I'm not,' he said, with that assured smile that Phyllida could find so maddening.

'Well then . . . if it isn't me they're interested in—that's keeping them down here—: what's bringing them in in ever-increasing swarms. . . .?'

'My dear, *what* a cliché! You sound like the *Trumpet*.'

Phyllida smiled, a little reluctantly perhaps. But she smiled.

'I feel like the *Trumpet*. . . . Ever-increasing swarms. There! Well . . . if they're coming down in crowds, what's bringing them, if it isn't *me*?''

The critic said seriously:

'Listen, my dear: newspapermen are like women. They work by intuition, not by reason. That's why they can appear—why they seem to take such pride in appearing to be—such uncouth apes. But the intuition is sound. They go by their noses, like hogs rooting after truffles. But . . . my lord! . . . how often they find the truffles!'

'Well? Can't you get to the point?'

'The point is that they do know, deep down in their subconscious, what stirs the hearts of men. They keep themselves—we call it "ignorant", but St. Paul called it "innocent"—so that the inner eye won't be filmed or clouded. They know with their hearts—and only with their hearts. Like children.

'That's what explains their inquisitiveness. Human beings are as inquisitive as the apes which are their cousins. Only dehumanized humans are ever without inquisitiveness; and the newspapers don't cater for them. They cater for people

who are interested in their next-door neighbours, in sex, in drink, in stomach-aches, in days by the sea, in love and death, and pools and regret and hope and superfluous hair and who? Somebody Important's going to marry. But . . . of course, the public that they cater for are like children, too, in the way that their attention is as easily lost as caught. You can't hold that interest long with the same thing. There'll always be their interest in the things I've mentioned, but the things have got to happen to constantly changing people. But if you do want to hold their interest for a long time, don't let the thing have happened. Keep 'em waiting. . . .'

Phyllida said, 'And . . . oh! Well . . . what are they waiting for, then?'

'What's keeping these droves of boozy newshawks down in this part of the world? Something greater than Love or Death or . . . or anything simple like them. Something they don't get so often: the spectacle of Abashed Authority; of the pebble landing smack in the middle of Goliath's forehead. Of the Naked Emperor.'

'You mean?'

The critic laughed, and smacked Phyllida lightly on the shoulder.

'Wake up, kitten! Of course that's what I mean. These vultures—well, good lord! What do you think they're interviewing the Bishop for? Why don't they give your pal, the Rector, a moment's peace? Why have they got the opinions of every member of this so-called *Christian Force* movement? Why have they got their tame M.P.s, who write the This-Week-in-Parliament articles for them, to ask Questions in the House? Why? But you know why as well as I do. . . . Think now. . . .!'

Phyllida thought. She said hesitantly, 'They want to make more trouble. Is that it?'

'In a way. But the answer's simpler than that. They are waiting for the Rector to put that memorial tablet of yours back on the wall of Hasling Church. . . .'

But the shock, when it came, was none of the things predicted by the critic. He had taken out, on Phyllida's behalf, a subscription to an international press-cutting agency, and the strangely differing versions of what *Time and Tide* had rather pompously called 'The Hasling Incident' began to come

in from all over the world. *Life* had given the Hasling Incident four pages; *Match*, three; *Oggi*, nearly six; and *Der Koelnische Illustrierte Zeitung*, five.

For each editor, the story had had a different 'appeal': it had been Philip's literary background which had got the Hasling Incident into the columns—on to the front page, to be exact—of *Le Figaro Littéraire*; but it was the suspected Communist affiliations of the Bishop of Rowcester which had caught the interest of *Collier's*. *Noir et Blanc* had remembered that two famous French aces had served for a time in Philip Hammond's squadron; and *Reveille* had certainly lived up to its reputation for finding an unusual 'slant' on a story by digging out the fact that Hasling Old Church was the only place of worship still in use in Britain in which a man had been executed. The writer of the article suggested that the ghost of the executed Cromwellian defacer-of-images was somehow mixed up with the business of the Hasling Incident.

Other journals, however, such as the *Wiener Illustrierte*, *Bella*, *Settimana*, *Actualidad* and *La Revue Internationale* found it unnecessary to take their readers so far back into the past.

'But they've got everything . . .' Phyllida wondered. 'I mean: half this stuff they've got without even coming near Mother or me. . . .'

'Well, yes,' said the critic; 'it's like that. They only need you for what they call the "human stuff". The gossipy bits about Philip's life in the Raf; or what he did at school; or how your father went out in a blizzard to perform an appendectomy on that farmer's wife . . . All that's better got from other sources. It's just a matter of routine. Is it getting you down?' he asked, not unsympathetically, but with something of an amused smile.

The smile braced Phyllida to say, 'Well . . . I suppose I can stick it. Like anything else, it can be got used to. And, even if Mr. Chrimes's hitting that reporter who pestered me outside the station did get into the papers . . . well, I must say that they seem to keep their distance rather more than they did.'

The critic looked serious. He said, 'That might have turned out badly. In fact, I think it would have made things very difficult for you (they're human enough to resent any interference with their job, you know!) if the focus of interest—what we may call the "storm-centre"—hadn't been gradually shifting, these last few days, from you (and Philip, of course) to the Bishop (and, of course, your Rector, as the personification of

the Small Man in Arms Against Authority). More than that, really, the centre is gradually, but perceptibly, shifting to the impersonal elements in the quarrel. I don't know whether or not the press-cutting people have sent it to you yet; but I'll send it on to you if you like. (And you can let me have it back, when you've read it.) It was in the *Chicago Tribune*.

'But it shows the trend. This McCarthy chap has now got hold of the story. Or, at least, he mentioned it the other day in some interview he gave. But, of course, you—and Philip—hardly appear in it, save as the agency by which the Redness of the Church of England has been shown up. And . . . that's what you'll find: that the centre of interest will gradually shift away from you, as a *person*, and tend more and more to fix itself upon you—and others—as *types*, as representatives, as personifications of abstract qualities and forces. Does that cheer you up at all?'

'I don't know,' Phyllida said. 'It's funny . . . but it rather makes me feel as though I'm being snubbed. . . .'

But when the shock came, it did not come from any cutting taken out of a foreign journal: Phyllida knew it when she turned to the features page of the old familiar *Trumpet*. And there—'It just hit me between the eyes!' she said afterwards—was the shock that the critic, with all his imaginative speculation, his assured prediction, had never warned her against; had never strengthened her—by forewarning her—to face.

But there it was; the article, under a headline in letters only slightly smaller than those used on the front page:

THE OTHER PHILIP HAMMOND

by *Anne Hunter-Greer*

Phyllida read no more. It was like the first day; the day on which the story of the Hasling Incident had broken. So like it. . . .

Only, Phyllida thought, in anguish, *worse*. . . .

Now she did feel sick; a horrible sensation which made it seem not so much as though her stomach had soured into an incurable nausea, as that her stomach had suddenly vanished, to leave an aching emptiness into which something malign was slowly and irresistibly and poisonously seeping. Around her chest, something had wrapped itself, constricting flesh and bone and lung: she gasped for air, and almost without volition threw back her dressing-gown, and slipped off the shoulder-straps of her nightdress.

Then she became aware of the furious beating of her heart; and, when that had firmly claimed her attention, she became aware of the bitter, acid taste in her mouth, so that she had instinctively to wipe, not only her lips but the tip of her tongue as well. There was a dampness on her forehead and under her arms, and the backs of her hands tingled and itched.

And then, the newspaper clutched in her hand, she let herself fall backwards against the high-piled pillows. Out . . .

She lay in a state which was between thinking and feeling; and yet which was different—entirely different—from either. The name 'Anne Hunter-Greer' repeated itself, again and again; as, in the tired mind, the rhythm of carriage wheels passing over the points takes on senseless repetitions of words or phrases. The tick of alarm-clocks on sleepless nights; the drip of taps in wakeful dawns; the nervous tapping of a fingernail on a desk-top; the pawing of a patient but bored horse: all the jingles which went with these—which were brought into being by these rhythmic absurdities—had something in common with the nature of the over-and-over-again refrain which was running around her head. *Anne Hunter-Greer, Anne Hunter-Greer, Anne Hunter-Greer*—now slowly, now quickly. Keeping time, in fact, with the alternating acceleration and slowing-down of Phyllida's own heart.

Sometimes, when we are shocked with brutal suddenness, we are spared, for a longer or a shorter time, the knowledge of what has shocked us: we are, in such a case, shocked into an insensibility of comprehension, even while being left the use of our physical senses. But there is another type of shock which seems to have the power to bring us to an instant, all-comprehending awareness.

We are instantly aware, not only of the reason why this or that discovery should have shocked us; but of the reasons why we should have been—should have put ourselves into a position to be—shocked by the discovery.

Phyllida knew well why the sight of Anne Hunter-Greer's name on the features page of the *Trumpet* should have had the power to shock her as it had done. Phyllida had no need to read the article; the very title was sufficient to force upon her attention the fact that she had striven so vigorously—and so dishonestly—to ignore: that she was fully, and bitterly, and hopelessly jealous of the mysterious Mrs. Hunter-Greer; and that that jealousy had sprung, full grown, into being at the very first mention of the woman's name. (No . . . it was not at

the *mention* of her name: it was earlier than that. It was at the sight of her name: at the bottom of a letter. . . .)

Phyllida lay back, thinking longingly, not so much of death, as of a blotting out of consciousness; of a sudden, total release into a state in which all awareness would be gone; where memories would be as impossible as the pain that they left; where there would be neither problems to disturb one nor solutions to seek.

It was in this state of defeat that Mrs. Stevens found Phyllida, when the old lady came in to pay her morning call on her daughter.

Mrs. Stevens had forgotten the 'shame' which had so distressed her at the breaking of the story; interest had succeeded to a momentary, initial disgust; and interest itself had warmed to a livelier, more exciting emotion. 'It's taken *years* off your mother's age,' the critic had pointed out; and—so typically—he had added: 'I don't like to *think* what will happen to her when all this fizzles out. . . .'

Mrs. Stevens came into the room with a sort of gushing liveliness which said much for the accuracy of the critic's observation. Her cheeks were flushed with pleasure, and her eyes sparkled. She kissed Phyllida, said perfunctorily, 'You don't look well this morning, my precious. Would you like to have a day in bed?' and then turned to the more serious business of discussing the latest developments of the Hasling Incident.

Mrs. Stevens glanced at the newspaper still clutched in her daughter's hand.

'Oh . . . you've seen it? *Isn't* it charming? Didn't you think so? I thought it was *so* nice; didn't you?'

'I haven't read it yet,' said Phyllida, with truth. 'I take it you mean this article someone has written about Philip?' She allowed her eyes to drop to the boldly lettered headline. 'This one?'

'Yes, that's the one,' said Mrs. Stevens eagerly, taking the paper from Phyllida's unresisting hold, and smoothing out the sheet on the vacant part of the bed. 'Haven't you read it yet? Oh, but you *must*! I don't know who this writer is . . . Do you? No, neither do I. I've never heard of her before. But she does write so beautifully, so really touchingly (at least, *I* thought) about Philip, that I should really like to meet her. I wonder who she is, Phyll? I suppose it would be possible to find out.'

'I suppose so. . . .'

'You know, Phyll, you *don't* look well. I wonder if you've

been overtiring yourself? Would you like to see Dr. Tonks, and get him to prescribe a tonic?"

"Why should I see Dr. Tonks, Mummy, when you—or even I, if it comes to that—could prescribe any tonic I needed? But . . . I don't want a tonic. I'm just a bit tired, that's all. . . ."

"If you say so, Phyll," said Mrs. Stevens, uncertainly. "Still . . . it might be a good thing to have a little rest. You have been going up to London rather a lot lately. . . ."

"Only to get away from these reporters. . . ."

"I know. But that's probably made it *more* tiring. I mean: having to do something for a *reason*, instead of for just the jaunt."

"Has the post come?"

"No, not yet. I expect it'll be here in a few minutes. Were you expecting anything special?"

"No." Phyllida gazed out of the window. It looked like being another bright day. Cold and bright. The sort of day—like the day before—which is bright enough to enable you to be spotted at a distance; and cold enough to keep your persecutors active. "Mother . . ."

"Yes, dear?" I' always meant something serious when Phyllida unconsciously used 'Mother' instead of the more usual 'Mummy' or 'Mums'. Mrs. Stevens automatically adjusted her mind to an affectionate, indulgent receptiveness. "Yes, dear: *what*?"

"Mother . . . Do you think we could go away for a bit? Somewhere where no one knew us. Somewhere where we wouldn't be known?"

"Would you like that, dear?" Mrs. Stevens asked, cautiously.

"Yes. Yes, I would. Oh, Mummy, I'm so *tired* of all this . . . so very tired. . . ."

"You must be," said the old lady, without thought.

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't go away?"

Mrs. Stevens sighed.

"Only . . . only that it's *exorbitant*, going *anywhere* these days. And I certainly shouldn't care to go anywhere where it wasn't at least as good as this." Scenting opposition, and preparing for it, the old lady added quickly: "But, of course, if you could see how we could manage the *financial* side of it. . . ."

Phyllida said, staring at the ceiling, "I think I should like to go anyhow. But"—her mouth curved in the slowest of smiles—"Philip's earned us all some more money." Mrs. Stevens coughed, and her eyes flickered uncertainly towards the door;

she always felt, she said, 'lost', when one of her daughter's 'fey' moods came on. 'All right, Mummy: I won't talk like that. I know you don't like it. Only . . . it's almost fixed that they're going to make an offer for the film rights of the biography. Ealing Studios. They'll pay quite well. I don't know what film companies do pay. I suppose it varies; but Ealing are good people; and they'll pay what's fair. It isn't fixed yet, of course . . . but it looks as though it will be. If it is, could we go?'

'Well,' said Mrs. Stevens, with brisk cheerfulness; 'if it is, then I suppose we could. Where,' she asked, adopting the time-honoured practice of changing the subject by enlarging upon one of its less practical aspects; 'where were you thinking of going? Somewhere like Torquay?'—since the old lady knew that Phyllida did not like Torquay—or perhaps somewhere new . . . like Stockholm?'

Phyllida glanced out of the window. She said bitterly, 'You think it will be *that* long before the money comes?'

Mrs. Stevens knitted her brows. She said, head to one side, 'I'm sorry? I'm afraid I don't quite understand. . . .'

'Well: I shouldn't want to go to *Stockholm* in this weather. So you must have decided we couldn't go anywhere until the summer. . . .'

'Oh, Phyll! As though I thought anything of the sort. . . .'

'Okay,' said Phyllida, sitting up, and realizing that anger did sometimes clear the mind of worse things. 'Okay. We'll stay here and enjoy our fame. Oh . . .'*—putting out a hand; 'I'm sorry, Mums. But aren't you a bit sick of it all?'*

Mrs. Stevens looked anything but in agreement. Phyllida, watching the bewilderment on her mother's face, felt a sudden upsurge of an emotion which seemed to be equally compounded of tender understanding and intolerant irritation. So . . . Mother had been as bored with life as all that, eh? So bored that even the invasion of her over-valued privacy had been—after the first small shock—a welcome thing!

And what about you? a small, still voice asked. Was your life so exciting; so full of interest?

Phyllida smiled, and patted her mother's hand.

'Don't worry,' she said. 'We'll think of something. And perhaps the excitement will die down a bit.'

'I expect it will,' said Mrs. Stevens, without much enthusiasm.

'Oh, well . . . What are you doing today?'

'I thought I'd go over to Rowcester and do some shopping.'

Then I thought I might go to the pictures. They usually have quite a good film at the Gaumont. . . . What about you? Will you come with me?"

'I'm going to London, I'm afraid,' said Phyllida, making up her mind at that moment. 'Sorry, Mums, and all that; but it's business.'

'I see. Well . . . Have you read that article, by the way? Oh, no . . . you told me you hadn't. Oh, *do* read it, Phyll! It is so very good. . . . *Promise* me you'll read it before Alice lights the fire with it!'

'All right, Mums. And now, I simply must rouse myself.'

'All right, dear.' The old lady paused at the door. 'Do you know, I don't think there was anything really wrong with you, after all. Just an upset tummy, or something. Do you know, you're looking better already?'

'Good.' Phyllida made herself smile brightly. 'I'm *feeling* better. . . .'

Phyllida, dressed for London, went into the call-box which stood on the grass triangle at the cross-roads. The skeleton of a suicide or even of a vampire was almost certainly lying some seven feet beneath the concrete foundation of the scarlet metal cabinet; but Phyllida's concern was with present griminesses. She took the exact one-and-eightpence from her purse, and laid the coins—a shilling, a sixpenny piece and two pennies—on the top of the coin-box; and paused before dialling the exchange. There was a mirror inset in the wall above the telephone instrument, and with the aid of this mirror Phyllida composed her face into the nearest that she could get to an expression of carefree, innocent not-too-bright-ness. She told herself quite crossly (but taking care not to let the irritation that she felt show on her face):

'It's silly to let your heart pump up like that. Just say to yourself, Suppose you weren't'—she boggled, even in private, at the use of the word 'jealous', and substituted the word 'upset'—'suppose you weren't upset, you wouldn't think twice about ringing the editor of the *Trumpet* and trying to get this bitch's number. (No, you mustn't start thinking of her like that: or you'll give yourself away.) Be calm . . . be calm . . . be *natural*.'

She simpered into the mirror, and—still without dialling—said aloud:

'Oh, I've . . . I mean: I *am* so sorry to trouble you. But this is Mrs. Hammond—Mrs. *Philip* Hammond. Yes . . . how do you do? I know we haven't met. . . . Yes, I'd love to. . . . No, it's nothing at all. Nothing, really . . . It's only—— (*Make this a bit brighter: take that harassed look out of your eyes. The-e-ere, that's better. . . .*) It's only an address I wanted. Yes . . . I'm sorry to bother you: I know how busy you must be. But I just happened to notice that my friend, Anne Greer, has done an article for you; and I *should* so like to get in touch with her. I haven't seen her since she went to Canada. Oh, *would* you? Oh, that is kind of you. . . . Not a bit. . . . Yes, I have a pencil here.'

'That's too long,' Phyllida told herself; 'and you must get that *look* right.'

She began again, cutting down drastically on the wordage.

Then, without speaking, she gave her expression two minutes of intensive re-education.

Then she dialled the number, anxiously watching to see that no anxiety showed in her face. The girl at the exchange said:

'Central 9000? Your number is Hasling 1097? That will be one-and-eight. Please have the money ready, but do not insert the coins until I tell you. Have you the money ready?'

'Yes,' said Phyllida, brightly, so as to keep her expression in order. 'All here.'

'Wait a moment, then, please! Please insert your money. . . .'

The coins chimed their several notes; and the operator said, 'Press Button A, please, Caller! Central 9000. Go right ahead, please, Caller!'

A different, dimmer voice, said, 'Central nine thousand. *Daily Trumpet. . . .*'

Phyllida said, still brightly:

'Oh, put me through to the editor, please! It's Mrs. Hammond speaking. . . .'

'Just a minute,' said the dim voice. Phyllida's heart sank.

Did anybody ever ask for the editor? Suppose . . . Oh, God, suppose they *knew*. . . .

She took a deep breath; and her heart began to beat with painful rapidity.

But now a new voice was in the ear-piece. Quite a pleasant, even if rather abrupt voice. It said, 'Editor here. Who's speaking, please?'

Phyllida stared aghast at her drawn face. Now that the time had come, she could not summon up a smile even on her face, let alone put one into her voice. Her rehearsed speech had

vanished from her memory as though she had been in the paralytic spasm of the most acute stage-fright. All that she managed to pant was, 'This is Mrs. Hammond . . . Mrs. *Philip* Hammond . . .'

She could—for the moment, at least—manage no more. But the voice changed over from an impersonal abruptness to what seemed to be quite a friendly abruptness. It said, 'Well, well! Good morning, Mrs. Hammond! Arthur Beckerson here! Very glad to meet you. And what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?'

Phyllida said, 'Can you tell me Anne Hunter-Greer's address?'

Just like that.

And Beckerson said, as though Phyllida had not forgotten all her carefully rehearsed speech; as though she were not pleading with the mirror to show her a face not drawn with panic alarm; as though it were the most normal thing for strangers to ring up and demand the private addresses of contributors; Beckerson said:

'Matter of fact, I've got it just here somewhere. . . . Hang on a moment: I'll find it for you.'

The noise of the hand microphone's being put down sounded shockingly loud in the ear-piece of Phyllida's instrument. She began to pray, very fervently, very rapidly.

'Oh, God, please don't let him go away and ask anybody who might stop his letting me have it! Let him go on forgetting—for just enough time, God—that he oughtn't to let me have it! Oh, please, God!'

'You there, Mrs. Hammond?' said Beckerson. 'Oh, good . . . Here it is . . . Got a pencil? Three hundred, Charles Street. Yes . . . that's Berkeley Square.' And then Phyllida knew that prayers were sometimes answered, for, as casually as he had given the address, Beckerson added, 'I've got the telephone number here, if you'd like it. Grosvenor 42787.'

'Thank you,' Phyllida whispered.

'Not a bit. Glad to oblige.' The impersonal quality went out of the voice. Abruptly: 'Mrs. Hammond . . . forgive me: but how are things with you? You don't mind my asking, I hope. . . .'

'No,' said Phyllida, not quite sure what it was that he was asking. 'No . . . It's very nice of you to ask. I . . . I'm well, thank you.'

'That's fine.' He paused for a moment, and it was with some

hesitation that he added: 'You know we're all for you here, Mrs. Hammond. . . . I want you to know that. . . .'

'Thank you,' she said, her chest tight.

'It's been a hard fight, Mrs. Hammond,' he continued, his voice showing his regained confidence; 'I know that. But I'm behind you, Mrs. Hammond—personally, I mean: quite apart from my being the editor of a paper which, I think, pulls a certain amount of weight. . . .'

'Yes . . . It's very kind of you.'

'And we'll win in the end, Mrs. Hammond. We will. I promise you that. So . . . keep your chin up, won't you? There isn't a member of the paper who isn't looking forward to seeing you win, Mrs. Hammond. I want you to know that.'

'You're very kind, Mr. Beckerson,' said Phyllida. 'I . . . Good-bye.'

She hung up, cutting off his own good-bye.

It was not until she had walked nearly a hundred yards in the direction of the station that she realized what it was that Beckerson had been saying. He had been telling her that he was fighting on to get the tablet put back on the wall of Hasling Church.

He had talked as though that were all that she wanted; had talked as though the ambition to reverse the Bishop's judgement were the all-engrossing, the all-stimulating, the all-activating purpose of her mind and heart and soul. . . .

And she had not understood him. Only now, pondering those reassuring phrases of his which had seemed so mysterious, so cryptic—and looking for a meaning in them—had she realized what he had been telling her. Telling her that he had not forgotten something—and reminding her, in telling her that, that at some point in the recent past, she had forgotten . . . *completely*.

Beyond the fringe of half-timbered cottages, whose red-tiled roofs showed up the grey of its weathered stone, Hasling Old Church bulked squarely solid against the tinsel sunlight of this late autumn morning. It was an ancient building, product of an almost bleakly uncompromising age. Parts of it were late Saxon, the rest was early Norman, and it had escaped the beautifying attentions of later and more sophisticated epochs. All its homely decorations had been hacked from the stone by the adze: zigzäg and dog-tooth and billet cut within the

mouldings of its round-headed arches. There were no windows, with pointed arches, whose stone frames held traceries to remind you of the spears of Heaven or the flaming splendour of the Most High. An oblong building, with square corners, as plain as a barn; and, like a barn, built for a plain purpose: to gather the people together, and to give them shelter while they listened to the truth or stayed after the sermon to ponder a little on what they had heard. A place to which they could bring their new-born to be christened, and the young people to be joined in marriage, and their dead to be laid to rest with a message of hope.

What turmoils and tumults this old, plain building had survived, unaltered—even unscarred! And yet, what fierce battles had raged around it: Dane fighting English, and English fighting Norman; and Maud's men against Stephen's, and the Men of the Red Rose against the Men of the White. The unruly, leaderless rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace had fought an ambush off at this very spot, so that they might push on to ignominious defeat. Here Cavalier had crossed sword with Roundhead, and a force of marauding Dutchmen, pushing too far inland, had had their boldness rebuked by the pitchforks and cunning of Northsexshire rustics. Two centuries had passed, and then the new ways of fighting had sent bombs from the sky. And again, a quarter of a century later, the bombs had come again, a thousand times bigger in size, a hundred times more frequent in their falling. And the old church had not lost a scrap of lead from its ancient roof, a pane of glass from its ancient windows, a splinter of stone from its ancient walls.

Indeed, this present trivial battle of ideologies—not even that: only of prejudices (Phyllida thought)—had harmed it more than had the more violent conflicts which had raged about it in past days; for the removal of the memorial tablet had left some faint marks upon the inner wall; marks which would take some time to efface.

Phyllida paused a moment to look at the church. The ancient flag of England still flew from the staff set in the corner of the cresset: and the flag itself, ignoring political change, seemed to say, *I serve only eternal things.*

It was hard for Phyllida to realize that it was she who had begun the Hasling Incident: it seemed as remote as any vanished happening that the old church had seen. She tried to remember, not why she had saved up for the tombstone (it had been a tombstone, then, and not a tablet) but why it had

seemed so important to let old Judkins record, with his ineffaceable chisel-strokes, a bitterness which could have belonged to no one but herself. Why had she wished to share it with the world, not only of today, but of tomorrow?

Had the bitterness gone, then? she wondered, staring up at the flag fluttering in the light, chill wind. Perhaps not altogether; but the need to share it—to let others know that it was there: yes, that had gone indeed. Gone with the sharing's having become fact.

Yet: here was the paradox. Somehow, as the world had been made privy to her most inward thoughts, she had forgotten the conflict that her own action had started. She had not joined in: she had merely started it. Others had taken up her battle (if, she thought, it had ever been her battle at all?), and she had stepped aside.

But how completely she had stepped aside; how completely she had withdrawn herself from the tussle and mêlée and conflict; from charge and counter-charge; from assault and repulse, and rally and overthrow; she had not realized until Beckerson's remarks had reminded her that she had forgotten what had started everything. Reminded her that it was she who had started the whole business. How strange! How queer! How . . . how *frightening*! she thought, turning away from her contemplation of the church, and starting up briskly for the station, that I could have forgotten so completely; that I didn't realize for a moment what he was talking about! That I . . . that I, of all people! . . . should have forgotten that that's what all the trouble is about—is *still* about: that the tablet's still in Mr. Chrimes's house, and that the Bishop is still holding out against its being put back on the wall of Hasling Old Church.

She came to the outskirts of the village High Street. Outside Mrs. Tillett's general stores some newspaper placards were leaning against the brick undersill. Printed placards being still forbidden by the Defence of the Realm Act, the placards had been hand-written in some of the blue pencil that the *Trumpet* had (according to its enemies) given up using.

Phyllida read all the placards as she went by Mrs. Tillett's—not only the *Trumpet's*, but all the others—including *The Times's*.

Most of them were variants on the *Trumpet's*:

TOMB
BISHOP'S
ANGRY OUTBURST
218

Yes . . . well, she'd read all about that. (And when you'd read what was actually in the paper, you found that it could hardly be called an outburst, and that the anger was directed only against the reporter who had been accused, by the Bishop, of putting words into His Lordship's mouth.)

The Times had, more discreetly (and more ambiguously, even):

MEMORIAL TABLET DISPUTE
FRESH DEVELOPMENTS

But a *Recorder* poster seemed to hint at some really new news; at something that Phyllida could not recognize from her reading of the two dailies which came each morning to 'The Firs':

HASLING MEMORIAL
LEGION CHIEF:

'WE MUST TAKE ACTION!'

Phyllida went into Mrs. Tillett's, and put twopence down on the counter.

'Good morning, Mrs. Tillett! I'll take a *Recorder*, please.'

Mrs. Tillett wore black alpaca, a grey cardigan, steel-rimmed spectacles, and a wig like a rather ragged doughnut. She hobbled with the aid of a stick and the three counters of her shop; and she mumbled when she spoke, for she had no teeth. But she was as sharp as a needle, and there was very little of Hasling gossip which did not come to her ears. She peered at Phyllida, affected not to recognize the caller for a minute, and then said:

'Why, goodness gracious me, if it ain't Miss Phyllida! Yes, me dearie: what was it you was wanting? The *Recorder*? Well, now: just to save me legs, dearie: can you take a copy from over there?'

She pointed to a news-stand in the corner by the door; but when Phyllida had crossed the shop, the old lady said:

'Ah, wait now. No . . . that's right. There isn't a *Recorder* left. Will you have somethink else? A *Trumpet* or a *Mirror* or a *Sketch*?'

Phyllida said, 'Well . . . no, not really. It was something in the *Recorder* I wanted to see.'

'Not in them others? They usually have it in all of 'em, dearie.'

'No,' said Phyllida, unguardedly; 'I don't think so. It was—I mean, it is—on the *Recorder's* poster.'

'On,' Mrs. Tillett's sharp old eyes brightened. 'You meant that there about the Legion? Why . . . ain't it in the others?'
'Not in the ones I've read, no.'

'Well, that's funny. I expect you could get one at the station, on Smith's bookstall. But . . . just a second. Harr-eeeeee!'

'Yes, Mar?' A husky voice sounded on the stairs through the small lace-curtained glass door; and heavy, uncertain feet were to be heard descending at a rapid pace. A strange, shaggy man of about fifty, with small, wet eyes, and a large wet moustache, thrust his head within the shop, and stared unabashedly at Phyllida.

'Harry,' said Mrs. Tillett sharply, 'I've run out of *Recorders*, and Miss Phyllida had a fancy to see what that was about the Legion. I know you read all the papers before any of us is up; so what did it say? You was in the Legion, so you ought to seen it. What was it all about?'

'Don't say, "You *was* in the Legion," Mar! Say, "You *are* in the Legion." I'm still in, so fur's I knows. Morning, Miss Phyllida!'

'Good morning, Harry!'

'You wanted to know what the Legion's a-doing? Well, Miss, I can tell you this: they ain't a-going to let no grass grow under their feet, are the Legion. General Brattle, he speaks up last night it was, at a big meeting they held in London. An' he says it's a sin and a shame a fine gallant oficer like your husband, Miss, should be insulted by a man no better than a common traitor. His very words, Miss. The Bishop says he'll have the law on General Brattle, along of the General calling him a traitor, when all he wants is peace, like Our Saviour counselled. And now the Minister of War has said that General Brattle was only speaking as a private person, and what he said last night hasn't got nothing to do with the Legion, official.'

'But how could they have got all this, Harry, if it wasn't in the other papers?'

'Ah, but, Miss, it was. It was on'y the *Trumpet* and the *Express* what missed it; and then on'y because we had the earlies. All the later editions carried it, and I reckon it'll be in all the midday evenings.' Harry rubbed his great, red, dirty hands. 'Ah, Miss, now you got General Brattle out fighting for yer, you'll see that Bishop where he belongs be rights!'

'Thank you,' said Phyllida, picking up a *Daily Mail*. 'I expect it's in here, Harry?'

'Not all of it, Miss. But the bit about what the General said:

that's there, all right. Smart bit of work, the *Recorder* asking the War Minister what he thought of it all! I reckon we're going to win this here Hasling battle, Miss, hands down!

'That's right, dearie,' said Mrs. Tillett. 'We'll see all them Bolsheviks with their noses out of joint yet, you mark my words!'

'Well, thank you very much!' said Phyllida. 'But I must catch my train now,' and turned to bang into the reporter. 'I'm sorry!'

He held the door open for Phyllida, and came out into the street with her.

'I'll walk along with you, if you don't mind. . . .'

Phyllida said, with a breathless little smile:

'Not . . . not for an interview, *please!* I . . . I simply couldn't bear it, just at this moment.'

The reporter shrugged his shoulders, though he did not slacken his pace. He said, 'Just as you like, Mrs. Hammond. You've been awfully decent, so far. If you'd rather talk about the weather . . . suits me!'

'It would be . . . less fatiguing. And, talking of that: *is* it going to rain?'

They both looked up at the cloudless sky.

'The B.B.C. said "mild to moderate gales, with slight rain",' said the reporter, in an unkind mockery of the standard broadcaster's tone; 'so we might look forward to this weather for a few more hours. Going up to town, Mrs. Hammond?' he added casually.

'Just for the day,' said Phyllida, curtly. 'Nothing to do with . . . well, with Hasling.'

'Oh, quite,' said the reporter, in no way put out. 'Did you see the *Recorder* this morning? They rather scooped us others, I'm afraid. I'll give them that.'

'I . . . I missed it, I'm afraid,' said Phyllida, knowing now that the reporter had been standing behind her in Mrs. Tillett's for some minutes before she had banged into him. 'I was asking Mrs. Tillett for a copy, when you must have come in.'

'Yes. General Bratule has really stirred things up now. He's demanded—apparently, there's some old Act they've never repealed—an inquiry into the Bishop's refusal. The editor of the *Recorder* had a brainwave, and sent a reporter along to the dinner of the Waterloo Society, that the War Minister was attending. I suppose he was so taken aback at being interviewed as he was leaving the dinner—instead of as he was

going into it (or he may have had one too many)—that he's committed himself, even if unofficially, to ticking off the General. You want to get the midday *Standard*: they're bound to have Brattle's answer—in full. By the way, you know Mr. Chrimes? Well, of course you do. . . .'

'Oh . . . what about Mr. Chrimes?'

The reporter shrugged.

'He's got your tablet, hasn't he?'

'Yes. Yes, he has. What about it? Please don't *hint* like this!' Phyllida stopped, turned towards the reporter, and put a hand on his lapel. 'Why do you have to be so mysterious? What's Mr. Chrimes done?'

The reporter looked down at the gloved hand clutching his lapel: he seemed, Phyllida realized, rather to like being held. She took her hand away—quickly. He smiled, though flushing a little. (He knew that he was not a good-looking young man.) He said, 'Mr. Chrimes had your tablet in his house. . . .'

'Well, yes. Of course. . . .'

But, as the lightly used alteration of the expected tense struck her: '*Had* my tablet? *Had*.'

'*Had*. He's removed it. You didn't know? Funny: I'd have thought you'd have been the first one he'd have told.'

Phyllida began to walk once more towards the station. She glanced at her wrist-watch. Five minutes, and the ticket still to be bought.

'I must hurry,' she said. She was thinking of Mr. Chrimes's face now: if one might imagine a love-lorn spaniel with a calculating look in its eyes, one would have a fair image of Mr. Chrimes's face whenever he was near to Phyllida. Phyllida shook her head. She said decisively, 'You're trying to make out there's some mystery in all this. . . .'

'No,' said the reporter, calmly, 'I'm just pointing out something to you that I thought might interest you. After all, the whereabouts of the tablet *does* interest you, doesn't it?'

They were on the steep asphalted slope, bordered with shabby laurel and cotoneaster, which led up to the green-painted station buildings. Phyllida opened her handbag, snapped open her purse, and took out a ten-shilling note. She was thinking of Anne Greer; and the thought was making her feel a little sick.

She said, rather breathlessly:

'You're not suggesting Mr. Chrimes has . . . *stolen* it? He wouldn't do a thing like that? I mean: why should he?'

She was at the ticket-office. The reporter stood back and

a little to one side. Even as Phyllida slapped her ten-shilling note on to the tiny counter, and said, 'Cheap day, London, please!' he said:

'Well . . . that's what I wanted to know. Have you any suggestion to offer?' He walked alongside of her as she hurried to the platform, and, after the man at the gate had clipped her ticket, and said, 'Just in nice time, Miss!' the reporter followed Phyllida through the door, and so on to the Up platform. He repeated: 'Have you any suggestion to offer?'

Phyllida turned angrily on the man.

'Have I any suggestion to offer on what?' she said. 'Why on earth you have to keep pestering me like this, I simply can't think!'

The reporter said, softly reproachful:

'I'd say that was the last thing I'd done, Mrs. Hammond: pester you. When I think of the way some reporters behave; never giving a person a moment's peace. I . . .'

'Well, you're pestering me now! And I wish you'd stop! I haven't the least idea of what Mr. Chrimes has done with the tablet; and I haven't the least idea where he's taken it. But I'm perfectly certain that there's an innocent explanation for all this—if, in fact, it *needs* an explanation. . . .'

'It *ought* to be explained . . .' said the reporter, guardedly.

'Well, then,' said Phyllida, now thoroughly angry, 'go and ask someone who can tell you. Ask Mr. Chrimes. Ask the police. Ask the directors of the United Provincial Bank. Ask General Brattle. Ask anyone—but for heaven's sake stop asking me! If the suggestion's not too innocent for you and your precious readers, has it occurred to you that Mr. Chrimes may have removed the tablet for safe keeping to the bank?'

The reporter shook his head, smiling.

'I don't mind an explanation not being sensational (which is what you're suggesting, aren't you, Mrs. Hammond?). But that *did* occur to me. And I went round to the bank to find out. They're closed today—as I should have remembered. But I rang Mr. Chrimes at Saintree, and he tells me that he hasn't taken it to the bank.

'But when I asked him where he *had* taken it, he . . .' the reporter frowned blackly for a moment . . . 'he refused to answer.'

Phyllida let her mouth twitch, to show the reporter that she was enjoying the thought of little Mr. Chrimes's having

told this Nosy Parker to go to hell. Her voice was no longer angry as she said, 'Well, then, what can I tell you?'

'You could tell me,' said the reporter, now angry in his turn, 'that you felt some interest in knowing what had happened to your late husband's memorial tablet?'

Phyllida raised her eyebrows, and stared insolently at the man.

'Tell *you*?' she repeated. 'Tell *you*? Account to *you*? And who, pray, do you think you are, to cross-examine me, and to brow-beat me like this? Would you mind leaving me alone? I have nothing to say to you. Nothing at all. . . .'

For a moment, it seemed as though her cold dismissal would effect its purpose. The reporter hesitated; made as if to turn away; hesitated again, and recollected his duty towards his job. Only raw kids, a fortnight on the *Upminster Sentinel*, allowed themselves to be told off; allowed themselves to know what a telling off *was*.

Life'd be okay for people if all they had to do to a reporter to get a bit of peace was to give him the frozen glance or the haughty goddlemighty stare! The reporter took a grip on himself; reminded himself that, if they got scared when they'd got something to hide; they'd got something worth hiding when they tried to put on the how-dare-you! bluff. He forgot that he had minded that Mrs. Hammond might be despising him. He, scented copy; and the thought not only warmed him—enheartened him—reassured him—fortified him—but rendered him (temporarily, at least) impervious to snubs. He said, aggressively:

'I'm not cross-examining you, Mrs. Hammond; I'm asking you—*very politely*, I hope—for information I'm perfectly entitled to have. You know who I am; but if it would reassure you to see my N.U.J. card, I'll show it to you with the very greatest of pleasure. I'm an authorized representative of the *Daily Trumpet*, and I'm only doing my job. Frankly, I think I've behaved very decently all through—very decently indeed. I've always been polite; and I've tried to respect your natural feelings. . . .'

'How very charming of you!' said Phyllida, in just that tone of voice. A bell chattered irritably half a mile down-line; and was petulantly answered fifty yards outside the station. A signal arm dropped with a bored thud. 'Am I expected to be grateful?'

'You could try to understand I've done what I had to do as nicely as I could. After all, it is my job to ask you questions. . . .'

'But not mine to answer them,' said Phyllida, sweetly: 'But even if you were in order in asking me, you're not asking me anything about myself now. You're asking me to tell you what Mr. Chrimes has done—if he's done anything. And I say: ask him. Not me! And now . . . could you go and ask him, please?'

The reporter glanced down the line. No smoke yet; but a faint humming of the rails told him that the time for opportunity was short. He said, not altogether without a conscious implication of menace, 'But what's happened to the tablet, Mrs. Hammond?'

Phyllida—angry again—said:

'For goodness' sake: how many more times do I have to tell you? *I—don't—know*. Is that clear enough? I haven't got it in my handbag. Would you like to search me? Oh, do please go away: you're boring me! Don't your editors ever tell you to behave yourself?'

'You don't seem to care much about it,' the reporter said. 'If the tablet was *mine*, I'd want to know. . . .'

'Well, go and look for it, then! And please leave me alone!'

Neither had seen the tall, slim man with the wide shoulders, who had come gradually nearer during the unfriendly interchange of question and answer that only the arrival of the train promised to end. Phyllida could not have seen him—since he was standing at the back of her; the reporter, thinking him just a waiting passenger, took no notice of him. But both Phyllida and the reporter looked up, startled, when the tall man, raising his hat, came between Phyllida and the reporter, and said, 'Good morning, Mrs. Hammond! Is this man annoying you?'

Phyllida, in that first brief glance, saw nothing familiar in the lean, tanned face, the deep-set grey eyes. But she saw something reassuring enough that she should say, 'Oh. . . . Oh, how do you do! Yes . . . yes he is. I've already asked him to go.'

The tall man smiled without opening his mouth. He looked at the reporter. But it was to Phyllida that he said:

'And he won't go?'

'No.'

The tall man said to the reporter.

'I think you *had* better go, don't you?'

The reporter said blusteringly:

'I don't think you know quite who I *am*?'

'You are a newspaper reporter. That is obvious. Why

'should that give you the right to annoy this lady, after she has asked you to go?'

'I wasn't annoying her. I was only asking her some perfectly civil questions, when you butted in. What right have you to ask me to go?'

'In a moment,' said the tall man, 'I shall not repeat my request. I shall kick you off this platform—out of the door or under the train is immaterial to me.' But he spoke without anger, without warmth, without contempt. 'Please be off!'

The reporter flushed. He said:

'Then, Mrs. Hammond, you don't much care where the tablet is? Can I say that?'

'Oh, say what you damned well like!' said Phyllida.

The tall man said, smiling:

'You must never say that to a reporter, Mrs. Hammond! For a moment, our friend here quite believed you. But . . . he will, I know, disregard that last remark. In fact, he will remember only that he saw you—told you that Mr. Chrimes had put the tablet into safe custody—and wished you good morning. You will, won't you, Mr. Reporter?'

The train came in. The tall man opened the door, and Phyllida got into the carriage. The tall man followed her, and closed the door.

The reporter stood watching the closed door of the carriage. He pulled his notebook ostentatiously out of his pocket, and wrote something down.

Phyllida, pretending to the reporter that she was not looking, said to the tall man sitting on the opposite seat, 'I wonder what he's writing down?'

'Nothing,' said the tall man cheerfully. 'What should he be writing?'

Phyllida smiled.

'They scare me a little,' she said. 'They're so very like what novelists make policemen out to be. . . .'

'Naturally . . .' The guard blew his whistle, and the train began to glide out of the station. The reporter, still standing, slowly receded out of sight. Wright's Coal Tar Soap, Nestle's Milk, Stephens' Inks, Waverley Pens, and the Abbey Road Building Society momentarily claimed attention as their advertisements slid past.

Then the flickering line of palings beyond the privet hedges succeeded to the enamelled advertisement boards, and then the asphalted station slope dipped down to the road along

which Harper's scarlet bread-van and Jones's green milk-float ran, for all the world as though no one were leaving Hasling.

'I always feel,' said Phyllida, 'as though I've abandoned them; and that's funny, because they look, from the train, as though they were never giving me a thought. . . .'

The tall man said, 'That's the parallax of the mind, as distinct from the parallax of the eye.'

'I . . . ? What's parallax?'

'Didn't they teach you that at school? Oh, well. Simply it's this: if you look at that church there, all the things in between seem to be moving backwards.' Phyllida looked, and nodded agreement. 'See? Yes: but if you look at the hedges here, the hedges seem to be moving back slowly, and the church more quickly. That is parallax. I said: perhaps there is a parallax of the mind. No?' His mouth twisted in a humorously self-mocking smile. 'I philosophize too much. Tell me,' he added, the smile not vanishing, but abruptly changing its quality, 'were you too angry that I spoke to that reporter like that? It was impulsive I admit. I hope you are not too offended?'

Phyllida said, frowning, 'I . . . Do we know each other? I'm sorry, but . . .'

He smiled again.

'No. We are strangers. That is why I ask your forgiveness. And . . . why I shall get out at the next station.'

'Oh . . . ' said Phyllida, conscious of a curious little pang; 'why?'

'Why shall I get out?' He shrugged, glancing through the window at nothing. He faced her again. 'Because I merely pretended to know you, so that I might relieve you from the attentions of the reporter.'

'Yes . . . I see. But . . . must you get out?'

The smile deepened, rather than spread. He said, with something which sounded to Phyllida like a sigh:

'I don't wish to get out. But when I tell you what I am, you will understand that I can do nothing less than offer to change my carriage.'

He took a slim crocodile-skin wallet from his inner breast-pocket; extracted a visiting-card, and handed it to Phyllida. On the card was engraved:

MICHEL GREIG,

DIRECTEUR,

5 Rue de Lucrèce,
Paris, VII

LE MONDE DES ACTUALITÉS

Tel: Zola 87-87

She looked at the card, nodding her head.

'Yes,' she said, without looking up, 'I see . . .'

'Only,' he said quietly, 'I would prefer that you believed that I did not do what I did just now in order to obtain an advantage over my rival.'

Now she looked up. She said:

'No. I think you would just have introduced yourself, Mr. Greig.'

'Greeg . . .' he smiled.

'I'm sorry. I thought it was Scottish.'

'It is. But a long time ago. I am a French citizen.' He shrugged. 'Now "Greeg" is the correct pronunciation—like that of the composer, you know.'

'You speak English extremely well, Mr.—Monsieur—Greig.'

'Oh, I don't know. Do I? It is very kind of you to say so.'

She said, almost rebukingly:

'You don't need compliments from me, Monsieur Greig. You know very well that you speak almost perfect English.'

'"Almost"?' he laughed. 'Now I shall tell you something, Mrs. Hammond. I thought I spoke *perfect* English. You see how one may have one's pride deflated, even in a railway carriage?'

'Particularly in a railway carriage,' said Phyllida, returning his smile. 'You remember *Boule de Suif*?'

'Ah!' His deep-set eyes lit up in an enthusiast's interest. 'Ah, you read De Maupassant? What a story that is! You read the French writers?'

'Only in English, I'm afraid. My French isn't that good.'

'But you do speak French? Read it? Ah, well'—dismissing temporary difficulties—'the practice will come. A week or two—a month or two—and you will be able to speak French like a native. Have you been to Paris lately?'

'Not since the . . . I mean: not since *before* the war. My husband and I spent a fortnight there at the end of 'thirty-eight. (Good heavens! I didn't realize how long ago it was.)'

'It is the same,' said Greig. 'Nothing is altered much—at least, in the outward view. Inside'—he tapped his chest with a slender forefinger—'yes: there are changes. But they are subtle; not easily seen. And the immense activity of everyone covers up much which is wrong. Perhaps that immense activity may even sweep away what is wrong. There is nothing like hard work for that. . . .'

'Perhaps,' said Phyllida, 'since you have mentioned *work*, this is as good a time as any to come to the point of your being here. You wanted to see me, you said?'

'For my magazine. Permit me.' From an inner pocket of his covert Raglan he took a folded journal. He unfolded it, and handed it to Phyllida. It was glossy, and had the by now stylized scarlet rectangle in the upper left-hand corner. *Le Monde des* in small type; *Actualités* in large capital letters. The four-colour cover showed President Eisenhower driving in state from the White House. There was nothing strikingly sensational in that. Phyllida turned the pages. Or anything strikingly original in the rest of the illustrations. It was a typical Continental journal, based on an American prototype; of the sort which circulates from Warsaw to Bilbao. Phyllida was conscious of a faint stirring of pity for Monsieur Greig: she guessed that the journal was but newly established; and that its lack of originality was something that Monsieur Greig had been at some pains to avoid. She said, 'It's very well got up . . .'

'Got up. . . ? Excuse me. . . .'

'Got up. Produced. Illustrated. It's a phrase. . . .'

'Ah, pardon me! I did not understand for the moment.' He took it back, and glanced at the journal for a moment, before folding it carefully, and as carefully putting it back into his pocket. 'I have a good chap for the art work, and the printers, Imprimeries de St. Claude, are the best in Paris for this high-speed work. They have the latest machines. . . .'

Phyllida said impulsively, 'Monsieur Greig . . . why do you have to make it look like *Life*?'

He looked puzzled.

'Make it life-like?'

'No . . .' taking a firm grip on her courage, now that she had submitted unthinkingly to a sudden impulse to tell the truth. 'No . . . not that. I meant: why does your cover—the whole magazine, in fact—have to look like the American paper, *Life*? It's the same all over Europe. They all look like *Life*—purposely. German, Turkish, Greek, Norwegian, French, Swiss. (I know, because I've had a chance to see them lately.) I don't wonder the Americans get swollen heads, when half the world is desperately eager to copy even the style of their magazines. What's so unfair—to the Americans, I mean—is that the rest of the world sets out to flatter their pride, and then blames the Americans for having been flattered.'

At first, Greig had looked a little disconcerted by this attack

on his taste. (And Phyllida could feel justified, in watching the changing play of expression on his lean face, that he was not forgetting such capital as he had sunk into this venture.) But, towards the end of Phyllida's speech, his face had lightened considerably, as the look of quietly introspective amusement had come back into his eyes. He looked steadily at her, as he nodded a gentle agreement. He said, taking a slim cigarette-case of engine-turned gold and costly appearance from his pocket, and opening it:

'Are all the pillar-boxes in England painted red, Mrs. Hammond? May I offer you a cigarette?'

'Thank you: I should love one.' She took a cigarette. He took one, closed the case, and brought out a lighter—also of gold. It opened into instant flame; and, as Phyllida lit her cigarette, she was struck by the steadiness of Greig's hand. 'Pillar-boxes? Yes . . . I suppose they are. I hadn't thought about it. . . .'

He smiled. Rather a schoolmasterish smile, Phyllida thought, though there was only the schoolmaster in it, and not the pedagogue.

'You would have thought about it had they been painted as many colours as was Joseph's coat. You take them for granted, because they are always of the same colour; and that colour has impressed itself upon your subconscious mind as the mark of the pillar-box.'

'You think my—how do you say it?—style is a copy of the American? It is. Why? Because the Americans were the first to establish this special kind of illustrated paper: neither a magazine nor a newspaper; neither a review nor a political journal; and yet all of these things at once. The red label on the cover of the original became a sort of—how do you say it?—trade-mark. People look for it without being aware that they are looking. When they see that red label, they look to see if the language on it is one with which they are familiar. If it is, they buy it—perhaps. But that is all that they do look for.'

'Do they buy yours, Monsieur Greig?' Phyllida asked, with a slightly mocking smile.

He shrugged, jerking his head about in what, to Phyllida, seemed a typically continental manner. His eyebrows jerked up, and his lower lip thrust out, as he said, 'Ah, well . . . There must always be a beginning . . . One tries . . .'

'But if,' said Phyllida quietly, looking out of the window, 'one could get what we call a "scoop", one might help on the

sales?' She added, even more quietly: 'In that case' wouldn't it have been wiser to have sought me out at the beginning, rather than at the end—after so many others have come to get the news?'

He shook his head.

'No . . .'

'No?' She was startled enough to turn her head away from the contemplation of a distant clump of elms, and look at him. 'No. . . ?'

He drew hard at his cigarette.

'Let me explain, Mrs. Hammond. But, first of all, let me ask you a question not related to anything private. May I? Very well, then: do you know why this story of yours has, in the American phrase, hit the headlines?'

'Frankly, I hadn't thought of it. But . . . since you ask: no, I don't.'

His hand made a faintly apologetic gesture.

'On the face of it, one would say that you and the late Mr. Hammond were not (please do not misunderstand me!) of the sort to arouse such world-wide interest as has, in fact, been aroused. You are not poor, you are not enormously rich. Your husband was not in any unique job, nor did he attain the very highest rank. Many authors joined up in the various services, both on the British side and on the other sides; and men of letters have, before now—let us take your Lord Byron and the French Antoine de St. Exupéry as two famous examples—shown themselves capable of energy and heroism in war. What is the answer, then? That you made some sacrifice to procure for your husband a fitting memorial? Mrs. Hammond, you know that most dutiful wives would have done—have done, indeed—the same. You yourself, I know, would be the last to claim any special merit for having done that.'

'Naturally . . .'

'As you say: naturally. And though the English newspapers gave this story of yours a world-currency by exaggerations of one sort and another, there is still the point to be answered: why did your story attract the attention of one—yes, even just one—London newspaper in the beginning?'

'Short of news?'

'No. And you know that that is not so. Even the fact that the clergyman opposed his Bishop's refusal to allow the tablet to be erected in the church has had many a precedent. Bishops today are rather inclined to wish to forget the war. (You will

not remember this, but there was some trouble at Louvain University after the first war, of a sort very much kindred to the trouble between your clergyman and his Bishop.)'

'You weren't in the first war, Monsieur Greig?'

'No . . . not *in* the war. I was just a boy, then. . . .'

'I'm sorry I interrupted you. You were saying?'

'Ah, yes. I was saying . . . Now: where was I? Ah, yes . . . I wonder if the *mysteriousness* of your story's appeal has ever struck you? Have you asked yourself: Why should this story of mine—every detail of which happened before—suddenly become of such huge interest to the rest of the world?'

'You are not a film-star, you are not the daughter of a millionaire, you are not a little *gamine* or even a *midinette*. You are . . .'

'Very ordinary?' Phyllida smiled, wondering why she—why the Englishness of her, rather—shied at, felt offended by, the blunt social classification; why English people felt insulted by its being pointed out to them that they belonged to the middle class? She fought down what she knew was an unworthy irritation. She said, 'Yes . . . it has puzzled me. For no one—no two people, come to that—could be more ordinary than Philip and I. . . . Have you an answer?'

'I have thought about it a lot,' he said seriously. 'But first: I have remembered something. Isn't this a restaurant-train?'

'Yes. It's the through-train from Harwich. There's bound to be a restaurant-car attached.'

His face lighted up. He glanced at his watch.

'Then may I offer you some coffee? Or an *apéritif*?'

She smiled.

'That's a wonderful idea, Monsieur Greig.'

He stood up, and offered his hand to Phyllida. The hand was cool and very hard.

She said, 'I'll leave my coat here. No one will take it.'

'I too.'

The restaurant-car was not crowded, and Greig, Phyllida saw, had that enviable power to command instant and unquestioning attention from servants. A steward bowed Phyllida and her companion to a corner table—well out of the way of other passengers—and the drinks were brought with a dispatch and a smiling courtesy which momentarily raised Phyllida's eyebrows.

Seemingly unconscious of his power to command first-class

service in a land where it is accorded to few to get it, Greig raised his glass. 'To your health, Madame! And to some happiness for you!'

Curiously moved, Phyllida stared down at the table-cloth. It was a long second before she could murmur:

'And your health, Monsieur Greig! And . . . success to your magazine!'

Greig said, looking through the wide window:

'England is at its most beautiful now, I think. You have an artist whose work I have seen. Hilder. He draws with a fine pen, and then puts in a wash of colour. He has captured this end-of-the-year bareness as no other artist has. His work pleases me. You know it, perhaps?'

'I . . . I think so. It's very subdued, isn't it?'

'Yes. I like this . . . ' And Greig nodded to the long-shadowed trees and the bare fields, and the dark boniness of the gnarled leafless hedgrows. 'It reminds me of the scenery I knew when I was a boy . . . Is the Campari to your taste? Good! A cigarette? Or do you prefer a French cigarette? I have some of those, too, as well as English. . . .'

'I'll have a French cigarette,' said Phyllida. Out came another case: of shagreen this time. Greig, seeing her eyes on it, explained: 'I use cases of a different make, so that I shall know which is which. . . .'

She laughed.

'Where did you learn to be so methodical? Oh, of course, all Frenchmen have to do their military service. (We've only had conscription in this country a little while: and it hasn't had its effect on our menfolk yet.) I expect you learnt your methodical ways in the Army, Monsieur Greig. Or . . . you were in the Army, weren't you?'

He shrugged.

'Military discipline, anyway. No . . . I was first of all in the Army to do my *service militaire*, as all young Frenchmen must. But . . . after that. Later. I was a pilot.'

Phyllida jerked her head up; startled.

'A pilot? What? An *air*-pilot. . . . Not in the R.A.F.?'

'No . . . Not in the R.A.F.'

She shook her head, aware only that something had started her into a momentary confusion. (*Why?*) She said:

'I honestly don't know why you shouldn't have been a pilot. It was only that . . . Yes, I imagined for one moment you might have served with Philip. I imagine that was why I was

'startled—or, surprised, I suppose. You didn't know Philip, did you?'

'No . . . never. But'—he spoke slowly, staring at the glass that he was revolving between thin finger-tips—'I am very interested in him, Mrs. Hammond. . . .'

He beckoned the steward, and silently ordered the man to bring more drinks. Phyllida said, 'You're interested in Philip?'

He nodded, with a little sigh.

'It was what I was going to say in the carriage. I was going, first of all, to explain that the appeal of your story, Mrs. Hammond, is the appeal—the universal and eternal appeal—of the story which has not only taken its characters from recognizable human types, but which may be taken, in a larger sense, as an allegory.

'Yes . . . I assure you.' The steward put the glasses gently down on the table. 'All the great novels of the world have two factors in common: they must be of ordinary people, and they must reflect the fundamental conflicts, not only of men as men, but of men as the personifications of abstract qualities. That is why we are able to classify the masterpieces of story-telling, not only by reference to their dramatis personae, but also by reference to the universal emotions with which they deal. Do you know what a pantograph is, Mrs. Hammond? No?

'Ah, well'—he smiled at the somewhat mocking smile on her face—'a pantograph is an instrument used by artists and draughtsmen, in order to make a very big reproduction of a much smaller drawing.

'One puts the point of the pantograph on the drawing, and runs the point over the lines of the drawing. Then, at the end of the long arm of the pantograph, a much bigger drawing appears: as big as you like. . . .'

'Oh, I *know* . . . I've seen them in that rather grand drawing-office store in Victoria Street. That's a pantograph?'

'Yes. And—your health, Madame!—all stories have that pantographic aspect about them. The small end of the pantograph is weak Macbeth, with his ambition, or weak Mademoiselle de Maupin, with her desires. And the long end is the eternal conflict between—not so much what is Good and what is Bad, as between what is stable and what is impermanent; what is Just and what is Unjust. . . .'

'So?' Phyllida stared down at her glass.

'In your story, the world has seen the eternal conflict between narrow-minded Authority and the more human

'Rebel. In a sense, it is rather—one may say—the clergyman's story than yours; for it was he who rebelled. But . . . the story sprang from an act—a wish—of yours, and so the world has identified the human, the non-abstract—part of the story with you. Besides'—Greig shrugged his shoulders—'a priest is not—how do you say this?—ideal for the part of rebel. It is not *chic* to cast a priest for such a part. The Church stands for Authority. So . . . people don't think this is good. They make their choice. They say, Ah-ha! but this is different. Here is a lady not connected with Authority. She is one of us. She voices our subdued but always present resentment. But she has spoken, and we will watch to see what she says now. . . .'

Phyllida said, only half-jokingly:

'Do you really believe, Monsieur Greig, that people think that far . . . that they really think at all?'

'That's too cynical!' he protested, with a smile. 'They think. Of course they think. But they think—more quickly—with their hearts—than—more slowly—with their minds. Perhaps they don't reason too much. Why should they? But they feel. And that is enough. Your story has appealed to them because it mirrors forth the eternal conflict'—he mimicked the pompous tones of pulpit oratory—'between the Macrocosm and the Microcosm! *Voilà, Madame!*'

He smiled, bowed, raised his glass, and—over the edge of the glass—winked.

Phyllida said, with an exasperated shake of her head and a curtness that even she did not know was not altogether humorous pretence:

'Do you know, Monsieur Greig, that—of all the dozens of people with whom this affair has brought me into contact—you are the first to have seen a funny side to it!'

He put down his glass with elaborate care, tilting his head as he placed the bottom exactly within the wet ring on the table-cloth. He nodded his satisfaction at having placed the glass within the 'target' at first trial; and then he nodded again—but in satisfaction at having done what, was not so clear to Phyllida. He said, with a musing smile:

'Funny? No . . . not quite that.' He pursed his lips, rocking the glass with a gentle, hypnotically effective movement. 'You think it strange that I can make a little joke? Wink like Maurice Chevalier?' He shook his head, sighing. 'You English are extraordinary, Madame, if I may say so without offence. You put on no mourning, such as we wear in France; you

'send' out no letters, with heavy black edges, in black-edged envelopes. You tell yourselves that you have freed yourselves from—what is your word?—the *mummery* (yes: that is the word: mummery) of mourning; but you adopt something which to us is much stranger: the curious pretence that—for a certain period after your bereavement—ordinary things have ceased to have their quality of ordinariness.' He looked up quickly. Too quickly; for he caught Phyllida off guard. He saw the flush on her face. He said: 'Madame, I am sorry. When I was studying philosophy at the university, my professor said to me, "Greig: are you serious in your intention to study philosophy—or have you adopted it merely because you think it is an easier subject to master than, say, the higher mathematics?"' And when I assured him that I was a serious student of philosophy, he sighed and said, "Then I must give you this warning. When you will have mastered all the principles of philosophy, you will then have to master something much more difficult."'

'What was that?' Phyllida asked, because he had paused to allow her to ask.

'It was this,' said Greig. 'He told me that I must learn to remember that I must speak philosophy only to philosophers. And that, should I forget, and begin to talk philosophically to anyone but a trained philosopher, I should be considered either mad or impolite.' He added, quickly: 'Which do you think me?'

Phyllida smiled. She would have put out her hand, to pat reassurance; but something (she did not know at the time what that something was) restrained her. But she did smile. She said:

'All you're telling me, is that I mustn't dwell too much in the past. You're not the only one who's told me that. It's only . . .' The smile faded for a moment. 'It's only . . . selfishness, really. We say we feel sorry for the dead when all we mean is that we feel sorry for our own loneliness.'

He was not smiling as he asked, softly, 'You . . . you are still lonely, Mrs. Hammond?'

In an old tale, it was a word alone which rolled back the door of the treasure cavern; a word which tumbled down the towering pinnacles of black basalt; a word which dissolved the precipitous walls of the guarded city as though they had been but a wraith of morning mist. . . .

He should have said anything but that—anything but that. . . .

It was the old, old pain . . . in what seemed the old, old heart.

She could not stop the trembling of her lip, and her hand was clenched so tightly on the table that the knuckles hurt.

She tried to look out of the window, but the distant fields were as blurred to her sight as the fluidly rushing sleepers of the down-line. She was only half-aware of the hand which closed, so firmly and so gently reassuring, on her own.

She took a deep breath, letting her clenched hand lie within the firm grasp. With her free hand she brushed lightly at her eyes. She said, 'I'm being silly. Oh, dear.'

She turned a smiling, tear-flushed face towards his.

He said, with a voice as gentle as his grasp, 'What are you thinking?'

She stared at him with wide, tear-filled eyes. She shook her head in a curiously childish gesture. Her lips were still, he saw, trembling. She said, 'I . . . I don't know. . . .'

He smiled, and pushed her glass in front of her. He said nothing, but she instinctively obeyed the implicit command. She picked up the glass, and drank a little of the Campari, smiling over the rim of the glass at his smiling intentness.

'That's better!' he said. 'You can smile.'

She nodded; a series of little, quick, jerking nods; with that childish half-smile pursing her lips. She opened her bag, fished out her lipstick and powder compact; and rapidly made her face up.

'Better?'

'Much better,' he said, gravely. 'What were you thinking?'

She looked out of the window. The smile saddened. She said, without turning to look at him, 'It's so strange what one thinks . . . So very strange. . . .'

'Yes. At certain moments the normal thought is the most striking of all.'

'Yes.' She turned to face him. 'I wonder if . . . No: no one could. Shall I tell you what I was really thinking then?'

'Will you? I should like to know.'

'I wonder? Well, then: it was this. I was thinking that, in all the years I knew him—even when he was in the Raf—I never knew him to have a cigarette-case.' The tremulous smile returned, as she gazed at the man across the table: asking him (no, he realized, *beseeching* him) to comprehend the need for remembrance. To comprehend what lay behind that need; to comprehend altogether what remembrance—for her at least—

truly was. She shook her head, not knowing herself whether the smile of tender recollection was for herself or for the dead man. 'Packets . . . you know: the paper packets. . . . That was all. . . .'

She had used only the personal pronoun throughout. She could have been speaking of any man. But that the man opposite knew to whom she referred; had known from the beginning; was apparent when he said:

'Ah . . . At last. . . !'

There was something almost of a too-long-put-off satisfaction in his tone; something of the impersonal satisfaction that a schoolmaster betrays—permits himself to express—when some pupil comes haltingly, hesitatingly, and above all tardily, to a recognition of what—to the master—is an obvious truth. Phyllida recognized that there was a significance in that 'Ah . . . at last!' that she should have comprehended. That she did not—that she could not—puzzled her; almost startled her. So that it was with a ring nearly of guilt in her voice that she said:

'At last? At last . . . *what?*' And, quickly, before he might explain: 'Are you . . . are you? Don't you like my mentioning that?'

He shook his head.

'I don't mind,' he said, answering the latter question first. 'You wonder what I meant when I said, "At last"? It's simple. I meant: at last you have come around to the—no, I shan't say, the truth. I shall say, instead: to the understanding of what should have been clear a long time ago.' He put his elbows on the table, clasped his hands together, and settled his hard chin on extended thumbs. His mouth was hidden. But Phyllida could see his eyes as he asked: 'You have not asked me once—ever since you told me that I was too late to get a story out of Hasling—exactly which story I was after.'

'No. No . . . I haven't, have I?'

'And do you know which story I came after? The story,' he added slowly, deliberately, full-significantly, 'that all the others have ignored?'

Phyllida shook her head quickly.

'No. No . . . I don't.' She was conscious that her heart was racing; and she could not meet his eyes. 'What . . . what was it?'

He took out his cigarette-case. Opened it. Offered it to her.

'A cigarette?' She took one mechanically. Bent forward to the flame of his lighter. She could see his eyes through the

flame and the smoke. He snapped the lighter shut; closed the case. Put it back into his pocket; and once more rested his chin on his folded hands. 'I thought just now that you had seen what should have been apparent from the beginning. I did come to *see* you, of course . . .' He smiled. 'But I didn't come to get *your* story. Did you think I had? You smile! I am sorry; but . . .

'No. That wasn't what I was after. Haven't you realized, even yet, what has been missing from this whole story of the so-called Hasling Incident? Missing from all the countless thousands of words which have been written on it in every conceivable language?

'No?' He shook his head. 'Dear, dear! Haven't you seen what has been wrong in the whole approach to the story?'

'No, I haven't,' said Phyllida, with a show of spirit. 'And I wish you'd just tell me, instead of playing this Twenty Questions game! What's been wrong with the whole story?'

He was unruffled; but the smile had deepened in his eyes.

'This, Madam! Every one of the journalists—brilliant and dull; stupid and highly perceptive—has written up the Hasling Incident as though it is *your* story. Some'—he shrugged—'have pretended it was the story of the clergyman who was formerly a colonel. Some, even, that it was the story of the Bishop. But . . . it wasn't, was it? And I think, Mrs. Hammond, that you now know very well whose story it is. The only one whose story it could have been.

'I think you do . . . *now*.' He said, very gently, putting out a hand and laying it over one of hers, 'Tell me whose story it is. . . .'

Phyllida said, 'Yes. Yes . . . I see.'

In the same gentle but completely authoritative voice, he said:

'I think you have known this all along.' He tapped his chest. 'In here, at least. And I think, further, that you have known it more clearly than that, too. Otherwise, why should you have felt it so necessary to go up to London, at the first possible moment, to see this lady—Mrs. Greer—Miss Greer?—who has written this rather—what is your expressive word?—ah, *yes*: this *gushing* article on your husband?'

'But!'

He smiled at her astonishment—at her amazement—at her shocked disbelief of her senses. He said, leaning forward to pull the folded copy of the *Trumpet* from under her handbag:

'There's no magic in this. Nor have I taken an unfair advantage of you. I assure you I haven't been spying on you.' (She was conscious of the relief that she felt to hear that.) 'But one doesn't need to be a Vidocq or a Holmes to read'—he was smiling again—'the plain evidence of the newspaper opened at a certain page, and because of a certain article.'

She shook her head.

'But . . . *how*?'

'Shall I explain? You are tidy in your dress; in your habits. You even remember something about your husband which showed a certain untidiness. (So untidiness offends you.) Yet the paper is not folded neatly, as one would expect; but opened at the feature page. It has also been much read. (Easy: the ink is smeared.)

'Then: which article on the feature page? Well . . . it is not hard to guess it is not the one which deals with that experiment with juvenile delinquents, when there is an article on your husband.

'Well . . . so far, simple. You wish to know why I am sure you are going to see her? Look at the page . . . Ah! You see? The address and the telephone number written against the name of the lady who has written this article?'

Phyllida said, rather primly:

'It could be the address and the number of someone else?'

He nodded, still smiling.

'Yes . . . it could be. But it isn't. You don't know this Mrs.—is it Mrs., by the way?'

'Yes. Mrs. Hunter-Greer.'

'Do you know her?'

Phyllida said:

'What do *you* think, Sherlock Holmes?'

He considered the question gravely.

'I would say that you did not.'

'Oh? But I could tell you whether or not the lady was married?'

'That simply means that you have prior knowledge. Either she has written to you or . . . Ah: she has written to you!'

Phyllida said, almost angrily:

'That's cheating! You didn't guess at all. You were watching my *eyes*!'

'Eyes are evidence, as much as any other thing,' he said, softly. 'And, as I admit that I *was* watching your eyes, I know you don't know this lady. Tell me: what is it you wish her to

'tell you? (You must remember that I have read the article, too.)'

'Well . . . really!'

'This is important.'

'Possibly. But is it so important to you?'

'Yes.'

Phyllida shrugged, in a sort of half-joking irritability. She said, 'You French!'

Michel Greig shook his head.

'But I'm *not* French, Mrs. Hammond. . . .'

'Well, Scottish, then . . . But a long way back . . . You're French enough now. . . .'

'Only since I was eleven. Oh, yes, I was at school and at the university in France, but I came to Paris first only when I was eleven. So . . . I am not as French as all that. . . .'

Her eyes opened wide. She said, 'Well . . . Well, what are you? How long were you Scottish?'

He reflected for a moment.

'Two hundred and fifty years.'

'Two hundred and fifty *years*! Then, for goodness' sake, if you haven't been Scottish for two hundred and fifty years, and French only since you were eleven, what in goodness' name *are* you?'

'I am Russian,' said Michel Greig.

The strangeness—and so, the shock—lay in the woman's complete identity with what, ever since Phyllida had received that stilted letter on its pretentious writing-paper, Phyllida had imagined her, pictured her, to be. The expected may sometimes prove as amazing as the completely unprepared-for. It had proved so in this case. Mrs. Hunter-Greer—dark, smart, no-longer-quite-as-young-as-she-had-been—was *exactly* what Phyllida had imaged out of the phrases of the letter from Canada, and from the physical qualities of the writing-paper on which that letter had been penned.

There was probably nothing so very mysterious about it, Phyllida tried to reason. The critic's maliciously exact non-picture must have influenced her imagination more than she had realized. But, all the same, it was astonishing—and, in a way, *frightening*—how the image and the reality became one and the same.

Even the voice . . . At once dark and brittle; low and

capable of a high pitch; eager and yet strongly controlled—toō controlled.

'Why . . . of course! You saw my article. I thought you would. . . .'

No reproach for the fact that Phyllida had never answered that letter from Canada; no apology—however insincere—for having written an article so intimately Phyllida's business, without having first asked Phyllida's permission, or—at least—having first submitted the proof of the article to Phyllida. Nothing . . .

Neither reproach nor apology. And that, thought Phyllida, means only one thing. But then, even though I didn't know *who* she was, I had guessed her existence; and we were fated to be, from the very first moment of our coming into contact (even though we had not yet met) at daggers drawn.

Mrs. Greer had not even asked how Phyllida had got hold of the telephone number. (Afterwards Phyllida, looking in the directory, had found that Mrs. Greer's number wasn't listed. And, even if the number had been that of a friend, you'd have thought, wouldn't you, that the woman would have expressed some surprise—shown some curiosity—that you'd got hold of an ex-directory number?)

'I'm lunching at the 'Ivy' with some friends,' Mrs. Greer had said; 'but I'm not being called for until a quarter to one. And it's now'—Phyllida could imagine the sort of watch at which Mrs. Greer was taking a glance—'just on twelve. If you'd like to look in for a moment now. . . . I don't know where you are, of course. . . .'

'Liverpool Street . . .'

'That makes it rather late. I don't see how you can do it.'

'No. I can't.'

'Better make it after, then. Say about half-past three? Here?'

'At your flat,' Phyllida had said, wondering why Michel Greig had urged her to see this woman, when all the inclination to see her had suddenly died. 'At half-past three.'

Phyllida had hung up, asking herself, *Why* does he want me to see her? I did want to. Once. But . . . now I don't want to any more.

Had she decided to be a little more honest with herself, she could have admitted that it might be possible that Michel Greig might not have as strong a reason for losing all interest in the woman in the short space of a little more than an hour.

A Russian, eh? How very strange!

Phyllida had never met a Russian before, who was as un-Russian as this. Philip had had some Russian and Georgian friends: ex-This-and-That, who had found a sort of expatriates' focus—a home-from-home—in a Russian tea-shop in South Kensington, run by an ex-general and his wife and daughter. (Phyllida had been a bit jealous of the daughter's over-proprietary airs; and the jealousy had not been cured by Philip's explaining to Phyllida how 'good' the Arakhnines had been to him when he was flat. Asking him to meals, and even, on one or two occasions, putting him up. She felt that it was unfair to her to be asked to be grateful to people who had encouraged Philip not to pull himself together. . . .)

As she had talked on the telephone with Anne Hunter-Greer, Phyllida had watched—had studied—Michel Greig through the glass panels of the telephone-booth, trying to persuade herself that she was studying him so minutely so that she might see how he differed in appearance—in dress, in deportment, in manner—from the possibly not-quite-representative Russians who had talked, and smoked, and drunk tea-with-lemon, and put it on the slate behind the frowsty lace curtains of General Arakhnine's café.

How old? Forty? Forty-five? If that reference to his being eleven when he first came to Paris had to do with the general exodus of non-Bolshevists from Russia, that would make him eleven at some time between the outbreak of revolution in the spring of 1917 and the middle of 1920, when the main resistance to the Bolsheviks collapsed. Michel Greig must, then, be between forty-four and forty-seven. Forty-five seemed a fair estimate; though he looked a 'young' forty-five. . . .

Mrs. Greer had been talking about the 'Ivy' as Phyllida had begun to study Michel Greig's clothes. They were expensive clothes; but they looked the sort of clothes where the costliness has been merely incidental to the first consideration of quality. They were not ostentatious in any way; and though they looked as though they had been made by the tailor of an 'English' shop in Paris, they betrayed no inclination on their wearer's part to be taken either for a Frenchman sufficiently cosmopolitan to buy his clothes in London or for an Englishman wearing his national dress. There were still subtleties of material and colour and cut which marked the man's clothes as being non-English; just as there were subtleties of gesture and phrasing which, even while he was speaking his excellent English,

marked it as the speech of one to whom English was not his mother-tongue.

As Mrs. Greer had glanced at her expensive and most expensively tiny Cartier wrist-watch, Phyllida had been thinking: I expect it's that ten years' difference in our ages which makes him adopt that rather ridiculous air of knowing so much. So much more than I. Or so much more than he feels he ought to admit I know. . . .

Phyllida watched him as he called to a passing news-boy, and bought a paper. Why did men always want to buy each edition as it came out? News could never be produced all that quickly. . . .

She had told Mrs. Greer that she was at Liverpool Street.

I wonder what his rank was in the French Air Force? I wonder if he got any decorations? I can't imagine him in anything but a fighter-pilot's job . . . though he is rather big for the cockpit of a Spit. . . .

Through the glass panel of the telephone-booth she had seen the news-boy come up to Michel Greig; seen the smile on one face, the grin on the other; seen the exchange of deftly whipped-out newspaper and silver coin; seen the courteous generosity on one side, and the gratified surprise on the other. Seen Michel Greig glance at the headlines. . . .

Seeing how upright he held himself; how his face seemed to fall naturally into such reserved, such self-sufficient, such quiet, reposeful and—yes, *silent*—lines, Phyllida knew a curious wrongness in the volubility that he had seemed to show in the train. He had talked so much; he had been so talkative.

But . . . that was not the face of a talkative man. No . . .

And suddenly she knew, with an unshakable certainty, not only that the tall, slim man with the grave face was not talkative, either by nature or by necessity of living, but that the over-volubility which had impressed her since her meeting with him—and, more, had impressed her with a sense of *wrongness*—had its origin and stimulus in some deep-rooted anxiety. He had been talking nineteen to the dozen; this ordinarily composed, reticent, grave, silent man; and he had been talking nineteen to the dozen because he had had something on his mind—something weighing him down—something momentarily making him nervous, making him act out of character. Through the glass panel she could see him now as he ordinarily was—with nothing weighing on his mind (since, diverted by whatever it was that he was reading, he

had, for a minute, freed himself from the mental pressure of (this worry)—and she knew that she was looking at the real man: the man that he would always be, were there no extraneous and accidental and all-preoccupying worry to jerk him temporarily out of his natural composure.

Mrs. Greer had rung off; but a glance through the glass door had shown Phyllida that there had been no one waiting to use the telephone when she had finished; and so she had not immediately left the booth, but had stood watching Michel Greig, as he read the newspaper. She knew that it was important to her to know something of the man before he should begin to offer confidences—if, indeed, he were ever to offer them. And she knew, too, that she should take advantage of a moment of singular mental clarity; that her intuition was being helped now by something of reason; and that, given a few more minutes of uninterrupted reflection, she might well come upon some important truths.

She waited in the box, half an eye (as they say) on the space around the booth's door, to see that she was not occupying the telephone to the exclusion of some needful caller; and something much more than half an eye on the man patiently and absorbedly reading the paper. Phyllida had thought back to the circumstances of her meeting this man; and quickly she had run over the conversation which had not flagged from the moment that he had closed the door of their carriage at Hasling until that moment when he had opened it on No. 8 platform at Liverpool Street. Yes . . . there was something in all that talk very different from the straightforward 'interviewing' that these last weeks had taught her to expect from newspapermen. There had *seemed* to be the volunteering of information on his part; but, as Phyllida remembered the conversation, she was aware that, all the time, he had been curiously reticent; that he had asked far more than he had revealed.

Why . . . For an article for his paper?

But if not (and why was she so sure that it was not? When she had not doubted the honesty of other reporters?) what was it that he had been asking . . . seeking?

To watch the watcher . . . She remembered the old phrase; and felt no sense of shame at thus spying on him.

For by now she had come to another certainty: that whatever it had been which had so curiously altered his customary behaviour—making him so oddly talkative, and, at times, even flippant—had to do with her. Yes . . . and only with her. . . .

And now, before she asked herself the question which proceeded naturally, inevitably, from the acceptance of the fact that he was worried about, concerned with, *her*, she must—she knew—ask herself how she stood already in relation to *him*?

To judge their sentiments in relation to a new-met man, women apply a simple test; and this was the test that Phyllida applied now. She asked herself: *If he were to leave me now, would I miss him?* And, since the answer, honestly given, had to be yes, she had then to go further, and apply the second part of the test, which is this: *Could I bear that being parted from him now?*

And again, the answer being yes, she went on to ask herself: *But, given a few more days—or even hours—of his company, of his presence, could I bear the parting with equanimity . . . then?*

The answer disquieted her. So much so that she began to ponder the advisability—even the necessity—of leaving him now. After all . . . what necessity was there to remain a minute longer in his company? He had not even asked her to have luncheon with him (though that he would do so, she did not doubt).

And that brought her back to the question which had proceeded, naturally and inevitably, from the acceptance of the fact that the thing on his mind concerned *her*—and *her* alone. She asked herself whether or not this nervousness of his (expressing itself in an unnatural liveliness of manner) had to do with the fact of his having been attracted towards her? But even as the question came into her mind, experience rejected it.

Phyllida had looked through the glass panel. Nervous . . . yes: he had been nervous enough. But not because he had found himself—even managed to arrange to find himself—in the unshared company of a woman whom he found attractive.

That wouldn't have made him so nervous, even had it made him nervous at all.

Not at forty-five it wouldn't, Phyllida told herself; not even if he hadn't been a Russian or a Frenchman or whatever he was. . . .

What, then, had been weighing on his mind?

Phyllida left the telephone-booth, determined to find out.

Luncheon at a French restaurant in Albemarle Street—'It's new, but I know the *maitre* of old . . .'¹—had resolved no problems: all that it had done, Phyllida felt, was to reverse the

emotional balance, making her the one more nervous, while something of the tension went out of his manner as the excellent meal went through its ordered courses.

The news in the midday *Standard* had provided a subject for conversation; but not a banisher of the depression which had settled down on Phyllida since she had come to the conclusion that this man had a secret in which—somehow—she was involved.

It was while they were waiting for their *apéritif* in the small entrance-lounge of the converted eighteenth-century town-house that Phyllida had said:

'You were very interested in the paper . . . while I was 'phoning.'

'Oh'—lightly—'were you watching me?'

'Happened to notice you. One's got to look somewhere . . . and there's only the mirror straight ahead.'

He refused the invitation to compliment her. He said:

'The latest from Hasling. Do you take *The Times*?'

'Good heavens, no! What an extraordinary thing to ask!'

'Well,' he smiled, 'some people do. At any rate, someone has written a letter to *The Times*. . . .'

'About . . .'

'Yes. And . . . apparently on the assumption that very few people—comparatively speaking—do read *The Times*, the midday *Standard* (and, I imagine, all the other papers) have reproduced it . . . and made quite a thing of it.'

'Oh?'

'It's in my overcoat, but I'll get it if you like.'

'No . . . you can tell me . . . ' She was conscious of a feeling that he wished her to know what the letter had said. 'What was in the letter?'

'Do you remember something the Bishop said, a few weeks ago?'

'The Bishop's said a good few things,' she smiled; 'as so many reporters have been to interview him. Which particular thing?'

'About'—and again she was conscious of a suppressed—what was it?—in him—'about the theory that the pilot of the German 'plane could possibly have dropped those bombs by accident. . . .'

She did not ask which bombs; she knew which bombs. But she would like to have asked what it was in his manner that she found so puzzling, so disquieting. She said, 'Yes . . . I

remember. The letter's about that? Someone's come to the aid of the Bishop?"

He seemed very excited now. He snapped his fingers quietly, and a waiter acknowledged the order.

'Yes. But in a literal fashion. Here . . . I think I'd better just show you what's in the paper.'

'No.' She put out a hand, and laid it gently on his arm. They were both aware of the touch; and she took her hand away . . . quickly. Perhaps too quickly for that taking away to have served any useful purpose. 'Just tell me what was said.'

'Well. It's from a professor of Oxford University—what do you call them: don?'

'Yes. Dons . . .'

'Well, apparently this don has been engaged in going through a mass of archives from the German Air Ministry; and among the many documents that he had seen, he has found one which is apparently a sheet out of a fairly lengthy file of papers. Ah, thank you, waiter. . . . Your health, Madame!'

'Cheers! And . . . this file . . .'

'This file, apparently, dealt with a complaint to the Air Ministry—the Reich Air Ministry, of course—from the Operational Command, about the faulty design of certain bomb-bay mechanisms.'

'Go on . . .' said Phyllida, sitting very still.

He sipped at his drink, and put the glass carefully back upon the table. His excitement was obvious now; but only by reason of a curious impersonality which had come into his manner. He was looking straight ahead as he said:

'The complaint was that the release mechanism of the bombs, which, in some cases, acted independently of the controls of the bomb-bay doors themselves, was defective. In some cases—mind you, I should have added that it was complained that the mechanism for controlling the opening and closing of the bomb-bay doors was also liable to go wrong—in some cases, there had been a premature, or at any rate an unintentional, opening of the bomb-bay, often with a corresponding premature or unintentional release of the stick.'

'And that is what the letter-writer suggests may have happened to . . . may have happened?'

Michel Greig said carefully, holding his glass in his hand, and watching it intently:

'There is a little more in it than that. This German document points out the obvious disadvantages of an imperfect

functioning of so important a mechanism as the bomb-release, and asks what would happen if what had been reported as having happened over an English village had happened over a German one. . . .’

Phyllida’s hand clenched in her lap. She said, in a carefully controlled voice, ‘But . . . there were a lot of English villages . . . bombed. . . .’

He said, as quietly:

‘There is a date-stamp on the document. Apparently, so that sheets should not become lost from a file—or get slipped in—it was the practice to number and date every sheet.’ He answered the question implicit in the utter stillness of her face. ‘The . . . date ties up. . . .’

She said, in a whisper, ‘Ties up. . . .’

‘Yes. Unless it is the most inconceivable coincidence, it is . . . the same. . . .’

There was a silence. Then Phyllida said, ‘Well . . . it’s all in the papers. Was there anything else?’

‘Yes.’ He seemed eager to give details. ‘The document said something like this: “One of our pilots, after his craft had been hit, ordered his crew to bale out; but then found that he had the craft under fair control; so much so that he was able to fly it as far as the Dutch coast, where he made a forced landing, without further damaging the plane. He reports that his stick was dropped entirely without any action on his part, and it is probable that this lightening of the load enabled him to reach safety.”’

‘Then the document goes on to say that . . . that though, in the circumstances, the accidental dropping of the bombs did not matter, the faulty mechanism must be looked into, as the bombs could just as easily have dropped elsewhere. . . .’

‘Where it *did* matter?’

‘Yes. The Bishop, of course, has been interviewed—though not by *The Times*—and says that’s just what he felt all along.’

‘Did it give the number of the craft . . . or the pilot’s name?’

‘Nothing more than I have told you. There was just that single sheet, which had become detached from a file.’

‘The rest may turn up, of course . . .’

‘It may. . . .’

Then they had gone in to luncheon; and during the meal Michel Greig had referred only once to the business of the presumed accident, when he asked suddenly, ‘What is your opinion of this theory?’

'That the pilot did not mean to drop his bombs?' She paused a moment, and then shrugged her shoulders. 'What is there for me to base a theory on?'

She remembered his answer; she remembered how odd she had felt it to be, even as he gave it. He said quietly:

'One does not need evidence if one wishes a thing to be true. . . .'

She had frowned at that, considering, not so much the idea put forward, as the reason for its having been suggested. She asked:

'You think I should wish that?'

He said firmly—almost (she thought) obstinately:

'Do you?'

'Do I what?'

'Do you wish that this might be true?'

'That it was an accident, and not a deliberate piece of awfulness, which killed Philip?'

'Yes. Would that make you happier?'

She had shaken her head.

'I don't know at all. I really . . . Oh, can we leave it for now?' she had asked.

They had not sat long over their coffee, for Phyllida had promised to be at Charles Street at half-past three. Michel Greig walked with her down Hay Hill and across Berkeley Square; and when they parted, outside 300 Charles Street—it was a small, modern block of flats, of the kind sometimes called 'discreet'—it had been, as Phyllida had known it was to be, with an appointment made for their meeting after Phyllida should have seen Anne Greer.

A porter in livery of brass-buttoned cutaway coat and braided trousers, striped waistcoat and white tie, took her deferentially up to the fourth floor, and pressed the door-bell of Mrs. Greer's flat. The bell made a sort of dim, hornet-like buzzing; and that Mrs. Greer had been awaiting her visitor with some eagerness—or, perhaps only interest—was shown by the speed with which she answered the door.

'Oh . . . Mrs. Hammond? Do come in! Thank you, James!' As the door closed behind James: 'Would you like some tea? It wouldn't take a minute to make. Or is it a bit too early? I've only just this minute got back from luncheon.'

Phyllida had been glad to be able to say, 'Well, so have I, as

a matter of fact. I think I won't have any tea just yet, if you'll excuse me.'

And Mrs. Greer had led the way from the very small entrance-hall into the living-room whose two sash-windows looked over Charles Street.

And that was how it had been: with all the strangeness—and so, the shock—lying in the complete *expectedness* of everything.

There was nothing here, either in the appearance of the woman or in the furnishing of her home, for which Phyllida had been unprepared: the woman, dark, smart, no-longer-quite-so-young-as-she-had-been; the flat, magenta drapes against off-white walls; chairs and tables of Sloane Square Spanish Renaissance in stripped-and-limed oak; too many cushions—some too small and some too large, but all heavily fringed and braided with old gold—and too many lamps and too many ash-trays. And a Pekinese, whose colour matched the walls. . . .

Mrs. Greer went first, so that Phyllida had been able to see how well she carried her superbly corseted body; how gracefully she moved in elegantly shod feet. And able to see, too, with what sculptured precision the obviously expensive coiffeur had set the sleek, blue-rinsed raven hair. Mrs. Greer was in the plainest of wool jersey, her only jewellery a magnificent bracelet of baguette-cut diamonds and emeralds, with a clip and a ring to match.

She smelt delicately of the sort of scent which was to be expected with that jewellery.

As she led the way into the living-room, Mrs. Greer paused by a glass-protected oak table on wrought-iron trestles. There were bottles and glasses set out as on a bar.

'May I offer you a drink?'

'No, thank you,' Phyllida had said. 'I've only just finished luncheon.'

'Ah, yes . . . of course.' Mrs. Greer led the way to a huge sofa, upholstered in magenta velvet and fringed in gold lace. She patted a cushion at one end, while she sat down on a cushion at the other.

She had said then, 'I must have a look at you.' She had had a look at Phyllida. 'So'—with a smile in which it had been hard to read very much of either admiration or friendship—'so you are Phyllida!'

'Yes . . . I'm Phyllida.' She added quickly: 'But surely Philip must have told you what I looked like?'

The slow smile on Mrs. Greer's face implied that the descriptions of errant husbands—while they are erring—are sometimes unsatisfactory for purposes of later recognition. But all that she had said was:

'Oh, you know how *vague* Philip could be?'

'*Vague?*' Phyllida stared for a moment at the hooded, dark brown, watchful yet inward-looking eyes, and then laughed. '*Vague!* You call Philip *vague*?'

Mrs. Greer said, rather primly:

'Well . . . perhaps he saw no reason to be . . .' Her jewelled hand, graceful and slender, made a sweeping gesture which implied more than its owner cared to say in so many words.

But Phyllida cared nothing for avoiding the explicit. She said, smiling:

'You mean that he rather avoided me as a subject?'

And now Mrs. Greer was smiling, too.

'Well . . . you'd rather expect it, wouldn't you?'

'You mean'—Phyllida still smiling—'that Philip could be capable of *gentlemanly* as well as *vague* behaviour?' And, while Anne Greer was still smiling, Phyllida had snapped out an unsmiling: 'How well . . . *just* how well . . . did you know Philip? Or think that you knew Philip?'

'As well as most people, I imagine,' said Anne Greer, flushing at the abrupt change of tone more than at the implications of the shot-out question. And, with some show of spirit: 'Possibly a little better than some.'

'Me,' said Phyllida. 'Well . . . now you've seen me: am I so very different from what you expected?'

Sweetly:

'No. Very much what I was given to expect. Are you *sure* you won't have some tea . . . or a drink?'

'I'm young enough,' said Phyllida, cruelly, 'not to need it. But do have one yourself, if you feel like it.'

And then, Phyllida remembered, Anne Greer had rather startled her, for all that Phyllida should have been expecting the other to say some such thing. Philip's mistress had said, with a curious absence of emotion in her voice:

'I expected you to get in touch with me, the moment that article appeared. And you did. But . . . something I want to know. *Why* did you?' And without waiting for an answer: 'Are you jealous of me?'

Phyllida took a deep breath. She was going to say what she

had certainly not thought of saying; and she knew this to be so. She said:

'It would be so easy for me to say, Of course I'm not jealous of you! And I could add, What's there to be jealous about? But that would be stupid, for any number of reasons. For one thing—though I never heard you mentioned; let alone heard you described. (Oh, yes: I promise you that's true! Strange as it may seem . . .) I knew *exactly* what you'd be like.'

'But *how*?' Anne Greer murmured, not unflattered.

'I don't know. Second sight or something, I suppose. Or because, in some ways, you're what a fool like Philip would imagine I'd look like if I had had all your money, and all the time to spend on myself that you appear to have.'

'Thank you,' said Anne Greer non-committally. 'We are at least trying to be honest.'

'I am, anyhow. You ask about my being jealous of you. Well . . . what do you think?'

'From the temper that you seem to have some difficulty in controlling, I'd say you were.'

Phyllida shrugged, smiling a little.

'But that's so strange. I'm not . . .'

'Not just a little bit?'

'No. But if you can't believe that, let me tell you one thing which may help you to credit it. I *was* jealous of you . . . for a very short while. So jealous I thought I was going to be sick, or faint, or die, or something. And that was only this morning. As little a time ago as that. . . .'

'And now you're not?'

'No. You find that hard to believe, I know. But I assure you that it is so. Really it is . . . I do wish,' said Phyllida, not only earnestly but with something of a friendly warmth in her tone; 'I do wish you'd believe me.'

'Would it help you in any conceivable way if I did?' Mrs. Greer asked, with no particular warmth. 'Are you sure you won't have a drink?'

Phyllida shrugged, and then, realizing that this may not have seemed over-polite, smiled and said, 'Yes. Yes, I think I will.'

Mrs. Greer got up with studied but unconscious elegance and went over to the table on which the bottles and glasses had been set out.

'What would you like? I have pretty well most things here. Whisky, gin, brandy? What would you like? I've some rather nice dry sherry.'

'Yes, thanks.'

'Some sherry?'

'Yes, please. You have a nice view here! Have you had this flat long?'

'Since before the war. I let it to a man in the American Embassy for the war. It was a sort of swap. I let him the flat and he got me a job with the American Government in Canada. We were both quite happy about it.'

'I'm sure,' said Phyllida. Mrs. Greer put the glass of sherry down on a small mock-medieval table that she pulled up with her free hand. 'Thank you!' Phyllida drank a little of the sherry. '*How* did you first meet Philip?'

Mrs. Greer brought her glass of brandy over, and, having pulled up the twin of Phyllida's small table, sat down again. She also drank a little, and then said, 'It's rather a story in a way. . . .'

'I could bear to hear it.'

Mrs. Greer looked sharply at Phyllida's bland face, and then drank a little more of the brandy. She said:

'Oh, well . . . I don't suppose you want every little detail. It was just one of those things. We British'—Phyllida looked up, raising her eyebrows, and Mrs. Greer's pale olive face flushed a little along her high cheek-bones—'we British rather tended to gravitate towards each other.'

Phyllida smiled. She said, 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to laugh. But the expression sounded so apt.'

'I'm glad you're finding it amusing, Mrs. Hammond.'

'Oh, come now! Don't be so snooty! Aren't . . . I mean: didn't *you* find it amusing? Don't grudge me my little bit of fun. After all, don't forget I wasn't having much fun at *that* time.'

Mrs. Greer stared at Phyllida with a look which had been known to make even shop girls under notice subservient; but Phyllida was proof against the damping effects of Mrs. Greer's rebuking stare.

'Really, Mrs. Hammond: I don't feel that this is in the very best of taste.'

But Phyllida had merely laughed. She said:

'What: that the widow and the mistress should talk things over, over a drink?'

'I *beg* your pardon!'

'Mrs. Greer,' said Phyllida, earnestly. 'I told you the truth just now. I do wish you'd believe me. I told you I'd been sick

with jealousy of you . . . at the thought of you. And that I wasn't any more. Won't you believe that? Won't you get it into your head that I'm not like this with you because I'm jealous of you, or envy you anything, or just don't like you? I don't think we would mix very well in the ordinary way; but that's nothing in your disfavour. I wonder if you do realize what I've realized in the last few minutes?"

"What's that?"

"That the thing which might have set us at loggerheads—once—needn't do that any more. And, for all our differences, in looks, in background, in point of view, we do have something in common. . . ."

Mrs. Greer said slowly, "And what's that, Mrs. Hammond?"

Phyllida said quietly, "Well . . . we both had Philip in our life, didn't we?"

There were tears in the other woman's eyes. Her face was drawn; suddenly she looked not so much older, but as though she were released momentarily from all artificiality. (*She'd never believe me if I told her*, Phyllida thought, *but she looks nicer now than she can ever have looked.*) Her mouth tight to control the trembling of her lips, Mrs. Greer nodded, her eyes appealing dumbly for something that Phyllida, in a moment of full insight, knew that it was hers to give, and was happy to know that she had it to give. At last Anne Greer said, "I . . . I didn't know about you . . . until *after* . . ."

"I'm older than I was," said Phyllida.

"Yes . . ." Anne Greer sighed deeply. "You . . . you learn to forgive, as you get older. Perhaps there's that compensation . . ."

"No," said Phyllida, gently; "I think there's even more in it than that. As you get older you begin to learn that, after all, there's nothing to forgive."

Anne Greer, Phyllida remembered, had passed her hand slowly across her eyes, as though to wipe away a frown, which was certainly not one of anger or even of impatience. She said with a stare at some shadowed remoteness through and beyond the sulphur chrysanthemums in their white-glazed vase, "Well . . . at any rate . . ." Then she had paused, and sighed; and smiled a little sadly. And continued, with what was obviously a break in the sense: "It seems a pity that all *this* should have happened after Philip's death. Doesn't it strike you like that? I remember. . . . At least: I know that he would always have liked to get somewhere. . . ."

Phyllida had nodded.

'Yes . . . he would have liked it. But I think he never really believed he'd ever have that sort of best-seller success that comes to some people, either early or late. And perhaps there isn't any other kind. Perhaps that's all that success is: recognition of your talents by a minimum number of people. It isn't just having the so-called "artistic temperament", and realizing its promise in the ability to write a certain number of good—even excellent books.

'Philip used to bring back books from the London Library that no one had ever heard of; and which were not only good enough for his research, but as good as books could be—in their line. But only a few people thought they were good. So . . . in a way, they weren't good. Or, not good enough. Success in your work isn't—I'm sure of this now—just writing or painting or sculpting well. It's doing that first, and then doing it in such a way that what you've had to say will be understood—or, at any rate, appeal to—hundreds of thousands of people. Philip—I *know* it; and *he* knew it—simply hadn't got it in him to achieve that kind of success. (That's to say, the only kind of success.)'

'But he's got it now. That's what I meant about its being such a pity he couldn't have enjoyed it when he was still alive. . . .'

'But don't you see, Mrs. Greer, that he *couldn't* have had it in his lifetime? Until I understood that, I was lost. I was lost out of my mind. I thought I was going off my head with the thought of the wastefulness—of the unfairness—of it all. There was a truth that, like all other truths, you had to make an *effort* to face. They talk about "unpleasant truths"—but nearly all truths are "unpleasant" in the sense that we'd almost fail—and always—rather have to accept a different set of facts from the ones we have to accept—which are there for our stomaching, whether we like them or not.'

'You mean?'

'Yes. Just that. Being killed while he was still young—even being killed at all—hasn't made Philip the success that he is now. In a way, his being killed has nothing to do with his being a success. The plain truth is that it was my wording that memorial tablet in the way I did—and that I now bitterly regret. . . .'

'Oh; but *surely* . . .'

'No. I bitterly regret it. I regret the bad taste of it; the self-indulgence; the childish exhibitionism of it. I regret most of all

that the words that I so carefully selected, the phrases that I so carefully composed, recorded nothing but that I was thinking only of myself; that I was sodden in self-pity. Instead of my action being held up as admirable—instead of my being held up as a sort of heroine—I should have had my bottom kicked.

'If the Bishop had had his way, he'd have done it!'

Mrs. Greer had smiled, but the frown had persisted.

'But it's turned out all right. Can't you see that? Philip would never have been known if you hadn't done what you did. . . .'

'True enough. But, in a way, it wasn't even my doing. I had no intention to do anything for Philip—or, if I did, it was hidden away so deeply in my subconscious that I can't truthfully say I was a conscious agent. No, Mrs. Greer, I just indulged my spleen. I was sorry for myself, and I wanted everyone to know it.

'And . . . Well, everybody must know it by now.'

'Even if regret's foolish, it's very natural.'

'Yes. But we were talking about the pity of Philip's missing his success. And that's silly. *For he had no success coming to him.* He didn't even have to die to get it. He didn't even get it by dying. The success and the death have nothing to do with each other. Death didn't make Philip into a success: the editor of the *Daily Trumpet* did that. Would you mind if I had another drink?'

'Oh'—roused out of the deepest of abstractions—'I am so sorry.' As she rose, and went over to the side-table: 'Yes . . . I see what you mean. But there's another thing. Someone I know was saying—I know you won't be offended at this—that Philip, in a way, had to die. I'm awfully bad at explaining these things: but what—what my friend said was something like . . . well: there are two aspects of Philip—I mean: as far as the world is concerned. One is the artist, and one is a character, as a *person*. And—my friend said—she had come across the room with the glass of sherry, and put it carefully down on the low table—'I don't know. Now I want to repeat what he said, I'm getting all muddled up. But it was something like . . . well, that Philip's death was a sort of fitting end! Does that sound terribly heartless? (I admit it made me feel rather awful.)'

'What I think is so odd,' Phyllida had said, picking up her glass, 'is that here we are, both not only talking about it, but being *able* to talk about it. That's what's so *frightening* about

life, I think: that there always comes a time when you *can* talk about things.'

'Yes . . . '—with a long sigh.

'I can only hope there's a heaven or something. It would be *too* dreadful if poor old Philip didn't even know. . . .'

And one other thing Phyllida was remembering now.

How, as they had been waiting for the lift to come up, Mrs. Greer had said, with that frowning earnestness that Phyllida had come to recognize as habitual with the other woman:

'I . . . I don't suppose we'll see each other again. But I'm glad we did meet—just this once.' And, with a sort of hesitant wistfulness: 'I . . . I hope you don't hate me?'

Phyllida had put out a hand, and laid it for a moment on Anne Greer's arm.

'No . . . I don't hate you. I never did, as a matter of fact. But even the thing I did feel about you has gone. Completely.'

Then the lift had arrived at their floor. Mrs. Greer had opened the door, and Phyllida had put out a hand. Mrs. Greer had pressed it. She had said, as Phyllida had got into the lift:

'I'm glad. You really have forgiven everything?'

'Everything . . . If there were ever anything to forgive.'

'Even . . . even Philip's being unfaithful?'

Phyllida knew that she should not have said it. But she had said it; and the words, once said, were irrevocable. She had said:

'He wasn't unfaithful. He came back to me.'

Phyllida was remembering this inexcusable, this quite unforgivable, lack of charity as she sat, in Prentice's, over some China tea which had been permitted to stay too long in the pot.

She was ashamed of herself; and something more than ashamed.

She was hurt—and, perhaps, even a little frightened (though this she would not admit to herself)—by the sudden, surprising evidence that the hasty, unthinking, purely reflex waspishness in which the most childish elements of her found their less agreeable expression, had not—as she had deluded herself into believing—left her. And, if the waspishness remained, was she then to consider herself grown-up-and-out of the childishness which alone explained—even where it did not excuse—that waspishness?

'I'm a bitch!' she said, stirring her bitter, muddy tea; and remembering another occasion on which she had had tea at Prentice's.

She considered the idea of telephoning Anne Greer: not to apologize—at least, not in so many words—but to say something pleasant, so as to show Anne Greer that Phyllida knew that she could have not said that last hurting thing, even if it had been true.

Particularly when it had been true. . . .

Phyllida was conscious of a feeling of guilt, and she was not in any way ignorant of the causes of this feeling. She had been uncharitable to Anne Greer; and Anne Greer, of course, knew that.

But, in addition to having been uncharitable—and, worse, in a decidedly unmannerly fashion—Phyllida had been hypocritical: though Anne Greer (thank heavens!) did not know that.

Still, Phyllida thought, the fact that Anne Greer didn't know how easy it had been for Phyllida to be philosophical about everything didn't make Phyllida feel less of a hypocrite.

Nor make her feel the less guilty because of an acknowledged lapse into hypocrisy. . . .

For Phyllida could have told Anne Greer that it was not the belated acquisition of a more charitable outlook, the delayed arrival at full maturity, which had enabled Phyllida to dismiss, so easily, the 'situation' existing between them. It was not that at all. . . .

No—and Phyllida, stirring her tea, felt her heart begin to quicken at the realization of the fact—it was because the burden of loneliness had gone, even though there had been no more than the promise of its banishment. Life (this was how the thought expressed itself to her) had something in it again; and as she was no longer at that stage of mental and emotional development at which she felt it expedient to shy away from even disturbing truths, she could admit that Life had taken 'something into it again' with—and because of—the coming into her life of Michel Greig.

Even in the mere ending of her loneliness there was not only the promise of a full (though, perhaps, it might be only a transient) happiness, but also the justification for her seeking that happiness. But she could have wished, she reflected sadly, that it could have been possible for her to come to her happiness—to the search for it, and its discovery—in a less urgent,

and, so a less critical, mood. Nearly eight years had passed since Philip's death; and those eight years had *enriched* her of something more than mere companionship: they had taken the last years of her youth in a manner which, fight as she had striven to fight against the morbid conclusions of self-pity, had seemed to her of a singularly wasteful and embittering kind.

She realized that she had felt an instant and instinctive attraction towards the man, Michel Greig, and that this attraction was mutual she knew: the only difference between her sentiment towards him and his sentiment towards her, being that he would tend to analyse the one to whom he was attracted rather than the attraction that he felt for her. And in this, he was—at least for the moment—the opposite of Phyllida.

The thought which lay at the bottom of—which was the cause of—her present confusion of mind was this: Is it Michel as a *person* who attracts me—and, I admit—attracts me very much; or is it Michel—a very attractive man, I admit—as an escape from this deadening loneliness? from this constant and frustrating sense of loss with which my empty life—the emptiness of my life—fills me?

She began to think about Anne Greer; and to think about the Other Woman with a sympathy which had nothing of pity in it.

It was easy enough, Phyllida thought, to make out a case against Anne; to see her as nothing but an idle *poseuse*, whose predatory nature had been given the fullest scope by her idleness. But—the truth now!—what lay at the root, both of the idleness and the predatoriness, but that loneliness that Phyllida herself had already enjoyed in over-measure?

What will I be at her age, Phyllida found herself asking, with a sort of panic horror, unless I do something about it *now*?

And that brought her to the consideration that what Phyllida was contemplating was no more and no less than what Anne Greer had done: she was human and she had been lonely.

Indeed, the only fundamental difference between her situation and Phyllida's was that the man that Anne Greer had chosen was not free to be taken. Was that all? Yes . . . that was all.

Ten years more, and even the age difference between Anne Greer and herself would be gone. Phyllida, revelling in this unaccustomed facing of the truth, could even find it in herself

to wonder whether or not, in ten years' time, she would have worn as well as Anne Greer. . . .

Well, then: she was lonely. That could be faced. But even loneliness had its compensation; for one could hardly be lonely and not free. Disastrous as loneliness was, it always walked with a more pleasant companion; though, in getting rid of loneliness, the companion, freedom, had to be got rid of as well.

So what it boils down to, Phyllida thought, is this: I'm not only free to follow my heart, but I'm also free to make a damned fool of myself.

It was at that moment that her inwardness astonished her. For suddenly she found the prospect of making a damned fool of herself an exciting one; heart-warming, even exhilarating. It seemed to her that one couldn't be otherwise than free, couldn't be otherwise than young, to be able to make a damned fool of oneself. . . .

She nodded to herself, her mouth set in decision, but smiling, too. The vicar's wife, with all the Selfridge parcels, opposite, stared in astonishment, when Phyllida included her in the smile.

'Just thought of something,' said Phyllida, brightly, beckoning to the waitress. 'Something I'd forgotten. . . .'

The vicar's wife frowned hurriedly, and busied herself with her toasted barm-cake. Extraordinary people you met! So odd. . . .

Outside the café a man was shouting his newspapers. 'Stahnoozer-stannard! All the winners! *Lace* results!' Phyllida bought the *News* and the *Standard*, because the placard of the former had displayed:

TOMB ROW
LATEST!

And the latter's placard had borne this:

HERO'S TABLET
WHERE IS IT?

She walked along to the bus-stop outside the Piccadilly Hotel, and there boarded a No. 96 bus. When the conductor came for her fare, she asked him, 'Do you know where the office of the *Daily Trumpet* is?'

Nine fellow passengers competed to tell her that it was just a bit of a way up Sock Lane, just off Fleet Street on the right. . . .

'Is it?' said the conductor to the world in general. 'I wouldn't know. . . .'

As the bus proceeded on its slow, jerky way through Piccadilly Circus, down the Haymarket, along Cockspur Street, and across Trafalgar Square to the Strand, Phyllida read the front pages of the two newspapers that she had bought.

She found nothing there to cause her to change her mind.

In the neo-Sumerian entrance-hall of the *Daily Trumpet* she asked first for Mr. Beckerson, and was asked to fill in a green slip, and then asked if she might use a telephone, and was led, by a bawlingly summoned, clapping and whistling youth, to a telephone-booth, which nestled shyly in a space between two gigantic plaster statues of Truth and Electrical Energy, with huge, flat feet, bunched fists and the faces of punch-drunk ape-men.

Phyllida found one and eightpence in her bag, and asked the operator for Mr. Chrimes's office number.

Michel Greig smiled.

'Well . . . if you feel better for having done this . . . that's all there is to be said about it.' Phyllida thought that he rather spoilt the effect by adding: 'In any case, there's nothing you can do now to change things. . . .'

Which was why there was the slightest coldness in Phyllida's voice as she said:

'Naturally. But I'd already thought of that before I saw the Editor.'

He asked, shaking his head, 'You didn't think, first of all, to offer this "exclusive" to *Le Monde des Actualités*? To your old and faithful friend, Michel Greig? Too bad!'

Phyllida said, wide-eyed, 'Oh . . . dear! Oh . . . dear!'

He leaned forward—they were sitting at dinner, downstairs in a restaurant in Romilly Street—and patted her hand.

'Don't worry!' he said, with a reassuring smile. 'A policeman, having dinner with a charming lady, would not like her to think for one moment of the fact that he might be able to send her to prison. I am really most flattered that you should have been able to forget—yes, and forget so completely!—that I am a journalist.'

'All the same,' said Phyllida, contritely, 'I feel most miserable about the whole thing. I *might* have remembered. Yes, I really *do think* I *might* have remembered.'

'But you didn't . . . ' he shrugged. 'And I expect,' he added, with a mock gravity that his eyes betrayed, 'you didn't want to, all the time.'

Phyllida gave this a consideration more serious than he had expected.

'You mean . . . the subconscious? Like Adler. I read a book of his once. No . . . on him, I mean. He says you only forget what you want to forget—even things you go mad afterwards to have forgotten. Silly things and terribly important things. He says that there's no such thing as involuntary forgetfulness! He says you will yourself not to remember. Have you heard of that theory?'

'Yes. I told you that I had studied—what you call, at your universities, "read"—read philosophy. Naturally, that reading involved some acquaintance with psycho-analysis. Yes . . . I know the theory of forgetfulness, as propounded by Adler.'

'Well. And what do you think of it?'

He smiled.

'I think—briefly—it has a lot of holes in it. . . .'

She shook her head.

'You don't think I forgot to give you the exclusive story, because I didn't want to give it to you? (Subconsciously, I mean . . .)'

'Or even consciously.'

He said, 'We have a saying in Russian which means, *The lock fits the key*. Do you know what that means? No?'

'Well. Sort of . . . Oh, you're making fun of me! All right, then: go on and explain—as you're dying to do. And what does this cryptic Russian saying mean?'

'Oh, no . . . it isn't a bit cryptic. Well . . . not to us. It is a peasant saying, as a matter of fact. *The lock fits the key*. It doesn't make sense to you? Well . . . let me try to explain. On the one hand'—he smiled—'we have the key. On the other, we have the lock. The lock is fixed, unalterable, according to some ideas. The key . . . moves; can be filed down; made to fit the lock.'

'So, the first instinct would be to say the reverse: the key fits—or must fit—the lock. But no. It is the key which makes the lock. Without the key, the lock is just a piece of useless metal.'

'The human mind is the key; life—the world—circumstances: those are the lock. And that lock is just as . . . Well, let us say that that lock fits the key. That the world of

a man—or a woman—fits him—or her. I'm afraid it isn't very clear, is it?"

'Not very. May I ask what that has to do with Adler? Or, rather, with my wondering whether or not I forgot to tell you, what I was going to do? (Though, as a matter of fact, I really did it quite on the spur of the moment . . . I promise you that.)'

'With your forgetfulness? Oh, yes . . . No: I was thinking that there isn't much difference between our conscious and our subconscious. They are really the same thing: just two facets of a single means to make our proper pattern in life: to make the lock which will fit our key. I'll tell you this, Mrs. Hammond. (No: I'm deadly serious now!) I would have been quite *astonished* if you'd offered that story to me.' And, before she might protest: 'You know as well as I do, that it would have gone against something fundamental in you, first to have offered it, and, secondly, to have had me even *want* it. . . .'

The protest coming to the surface sank before it could gasp the air of recognition. It was drowned, gone. She nodded, sighing in a sort of wonder.

'Yes . . . Yes . . . that's true. But . . . why?'

He said, 'It's because you've never seen me as anything else but . . . well, something different from what I represented myself to be. . . .'

'Different?' She pondered that. 'But, then . . . aren't you anything to do with *Le Monde des Something-or-Other*?'

'*Des Actualités*. Oh, but of course I am. Let me see: I seem to remember presenting my card.'

'Oh, yes. Your card. But still . . .'

'It was quite genuine. Yes, that's my paper. But I still say you never thought of me as a journalist. Have you asked yourself why?'

She smiled, shaking her head.

'Perhaps because you didn't pester me? Because you were rather more polite than the others? Took me to luncheon?'

'The others could have done—could have been—all those things. But have you not asked yourself?'

'Yes. Well . . . yes. Of course I have. . . .'

'And come to no conclusion?'

'Not really. I . . . I shall have to say something that isn't usually said in England. I think it must have been because you seemed to be a gentleman. . . .'

'Oh! And journalists are not gentlemen in England, then?'

'I've never met one. There may be a few, of course; but if there are, they've never come my way. I . . . I imagine I couldn't quite reconcile the thought of your being a journalist with the patent fact of your being a gentleman. And, as you seemed to be a gentleman, I must have rather forgotten that you'd said you were a journalist. Is that it?'

'It hangs together. But whether it's the truth or not, I couldn't say. At any rate, you had forgotten I was a journalist?'

'Yes.'

'I see. Tell me . . . did you disbelieve me when I said that I was a journalist?'

'Not altogether. I . . . Let me's see what did I think? Oh . . . well . . . I think I thought you'd just gone into—well, you wouldn't call it exactly journalism, would you? Magazines. I thought you'd just had an idea to try your hand at something rather high class in the literary line.'

'*Mon âieu!* High class! Why, do you know we had the whole story last month—with pictures—of the business of the woman who murdered those sixteen orphan children?'

'It must be the cover or something,' said Phyllida, vaguely.

'It is straightforward vulgar journalism,' said Michel, sticking his jaw out. 'And I want to know why you thought I was anything else than a common journalist?'

She laughed.

'I don't know. Except . . . you don't look the part. Tell me: have you always been a journalist?'

'At last!' he said gently. 'I was wondering when you would begin to ask me something about myself.'

'Because you like the opportunity of talking about yourself?'

'Because it would show that you had some interest in me. . . .'

Had the words been even lightly spoken, Phyllida knew, they would have caught at her heart. But they had not been lightly spoken, and her heart was telling her so. She felt that the room had got suddenly hotter, and smaller, and more airless: and it had been hot and small and airless before, though it had not seemed to matter.

For the moment, she knew a curious desire to be elsewhere, and with that desire came an equally curious disinclination to look at Michel. She did not wish to be with anyone else: she wished only for a solitude in which she could ponder—digest—the fact that the expected had at last come to the verge of imminence. She felt the ancient desire of all human beings in the moment of proffered, sought-for capture: to escape.

She said quickly, 'Well . . . All right then. Have you always been a journalist—I mean, except when you were in the Air Force? What did you do when you came down from the university?'

He seemed the least amount disappointed at her question; she had the strongest impression that he was expecting something different. He said:

'I was to have gone into my father's business. He died when I was a boy; but the business continues to this day. For a time I was in the business, but . . . I got fed up. Don't you want to ask what that business means?'

She smiled, a little wistfully.

'You make a mystery of it. Well . . . what was it?'

'A bank. One of those small private banks which are nearly vanished in England; but which still exist on the Continent. The bank was founded by my great-grandfather in Odessa: mainly for financing the export of grain. As a matter of fact, we still have some of our connection left, even with this present régime.' His face, she saw, was carefully non-committal as he said this: but there was an inflection in his tone, as he used the phrase 'this régime' which betrayed a strong prejudice in favour of 'this régime's' predecessors. Conscious of the fact that, against his intention, he had allowed himself to betray a prejudice, he continued quickly: 'Our firm had various branches abroad: in the Black Sea, of course, and the Levant; but also in Genoa and Naples and Marseilles. So, when the Russian Revolution broke out, my father transferred the head office from Odessa to Paris, with Marseilles as a sort of principal subsidiary office. Though, as it happened, the Bolsheviks, for their own purposes, saw fit to recognize our company as one with a foreign registration. It was useful to them for clearing payments for grain cargoes and other things; and so we didn't have to submit to confiscation.'

'So . . . when the Revolution broke out, you were all right?'

His eyes narrowed, and his gaze was remote, as he said:

'All right? Oh, yes, I suppose so. We lost everything in Russia, of course. But we were not reduced to beggary, as so many others were. I got out . . . eventually. My father, fortunately for him was in France, trying to do something or other.'

'And your mother? Were you the only son?'

He looked very pensive for a moment. He shook his head.

'No. I had two sisters and a brother. They were killed. With my mother. . . .'

He gave a sort of duty-smile, to tell her that she was not to impose the burden of a conventional regret upon herself. But Phyllida, understanding the smile, said impulsively, 'I'm sorry! I shouldn't have asked.' And she added: 'You can't like the present lot very much.'

'No,' he said, 'I don't like, as you say, the present lot very much.'

But after the waiter had brought more coffee Phyllida said:

'You know: when you tell me that you were in a bank, I find that that doesn't surprise me so much. You've guessed something . . . well . . . professional. . . though you could have been an architect, or something like that. . .'

'Oh? How?' he asked, eager to have the subject changed for him; eager, for his own reasons, to forget the past. 'How did you guess? Because I wear a dark tie?' He smiled. 'White collar?'

'Cigarette-case,' said Phyllida, smiling. 'Lighter that works. Visiting-cards. In their case.'

'Oh! As obvious as all that?'

'Pretty nearly. Women, in any event, notice.'

'Yes.' He paused for a moment, then: 'And what else have you noticed?'

Phyllida did not pause. The compulsion under which she spoke—and spoke without her being able to draw back—was as sudden as it was undeniable. Even as she spoke, she feared, drew back. But the words had been spoken; as the inner compulsion had urged her—against all politeness, against all manifest advantage, against—even—all reason, to speak. She said quietly:

'Yes: I've noticed one other thing. There's something you think I ought to know . . . and that you're afraid to tell me.'

His eyes, after one penetrating glance, dropped to the glass that he was twirling between narrow, slightly trembling fingers. There passed a long moment before he said, even more quietly than the voice with which she had challenged him, 'You must tell me something first. . . . Something, before I can tell you.'

She put out her hand, moved by she knew not what impulse of understanding, of compassion, of tenderness. She laid her hand on his, and gave his trembling hand a squeeze of affectionate, tolerant reassurance. She smiled, shaking her head in a sort of gentle, rallying rebuke.

'You silly man!' she said, gently. 'What is it ~~you~~ want to know?'

* * *

This is it! thought Phyllida, bracing herself to meet the final challenge, not so much to her ability to forgive as to her ability to forget. Yet, even as she recognized this moment as critical in her affairs, she realized, with some astonishment, that the strength to resolve whatever difficulty lay ahead must be found by her; and more . . . that the strength—the necessary strength; no matter ~~how much~~—was called for—was hers to find. She had it.

Her hands fell into her lap, as she composed herself to listen; but they were lightly linked; and they were not trembling. The strength warmed her, flowed out from her, embracing and sustaining them both.

He said, 'You told the Editor to call the whole thing off?'

'I made a statement. They've got a tame lawyer in all these newspaper offices. For good measure, we even had him in to witness the document. I expect people will say I was paid by the *Trumpet*; but I wasn't, and I can bear what people say.'

He nodded. She could almost hear the unspoken: 'That's number one question. . . .'

He said, with an almost passionate earnestness, 'Phyllida . . .' And his first use of her Christian name passed unnoticed by him, though not by her. 'Phyllida: *why* did you decide to do this thing?'

She asked, knowing that the question was foolish:

'Why . . . don't you think I should have?'

He made an impatient gesture with his hand.

'Please! Look at me, Phyllida! Will you believe me when I tell you that . . . that. . . ?'

He broke off, and fumbled rather clumsily with his glass.

'That what?' she prompted, gently.

He recovered his momentarily lost poise. He said:

'I'll put it in another way. You said just now that . . . No: it was I who said it. (But it comes to the same thing.) We were talking of your not quite accepted me as a journalist. That means: you didn't quite believe me when I said I'd come to get a story from you.'

'No. That's true. I didn't somehow. . . .'

He smiled, shaking his head.

'You were right, Phyllida . . . (May I call you Phyllida? You permit me?)'

She answered with a brief touch of her hand on his.

He said, "If you didn't think I had come to England to interview you about my journal, what . . . what did you think I came to see you about?"

"You came . . . Well, if it didn't sound too horribly conceited, I'd say you'd come especially to see me."

He nodded.

"Yes. That is true. I did. It was to see you . . . and only you."

She did not ask why. All that she said was:

"Another thing I forgot to tell you: I mentioned through to Mr. Chrimes. You know: the book-keeper. He told him to take the tablet back to Judkins. Judkins will know what to do."

He nodded again.

"Yes. But still you haven't answered me. Why did you do all this? Why, Phyllida? What brought about this change of . . . this change?"

"You can say it," she said, quietly. "You can say it . . . Michel. "Change of heart." Was that the phrase you were going to use? Go on: use it. It was a change of heart."

"Dear Phyllida!" he sighed. "And do you know, then, what brought it about?"

Phyllida shrugged, and looked away for a moment. Then she said:

"I . . . I don't know really. (But I shall know one of these days.) Oh, yes . . . it was something to do with you, all right. Though . . . now I look back, it's been coming for some time. I think you just brought it to a head. And then," she added, "I saw Anne Greer this afternoon. . . ."

"Ah, yes . . ."

"I wondered why you were so keen on my seeing her."

He smiled.

"Do you know now?"

She nodded.

"Yes. I think so. I . . . I wonder if you'll understand this. (It sounds a bit highfalutin, but I don't know how else to say it. . . .)"

"Try!"

"Well . . . all right then. At least, I know that *you* won't laugh."

"No . . . I shan't laugh. . . ."

"Well, then: I suddenly wondered why I was feeling quite justified in—not exactly hating her—but getting ready to hate her if I felt like it. And then . . . I don't know, Michel: the

injustice of the whole thing struck me. Oh . . . words! . . . that: the abominable absurdity of it. I don't know; but I suddenly began to ask myself what *right* I'd got ~~for that~~, not only Mrs. Greer, but anyone. We'd both loved Philip. Where was the crime in her loving him—in her having loved him? And then I had a curious persuasion that she'd loved Philip more than I did. (Though her money, and various other things, may have had something to do with that.) But she did genuinely love him, Michel. I know she did. . . .'

'So do I, Phyllida.'

'You! But . . . but ~~do I know her?~~ Is *that* why you wanted me to see her? Why you were so keen—so insistent?'

'No. I have never met her. I knew nothing about her until I read her article this morning. But that article told me a lot. I wanted you to ~~see it~~, to—what do you say in English?—to get her settled?'

'I think,' said Phyllida, with a little laugh, 'that you mean: get her out of my system. Well'—the smile fading—'she's out of my system. At least, the bad things I felt for her. I . . . I don't hate her now.'

'I am glad. And you came away, then, from Mrs. Greer's with the intention to stop everything. . . .?'

'Yes. I . . . Let me see now: it's all happened so quickly, even I have to think a bit, to get it all in focus. I . . . Oh, yes; well, yes—and there was the business of this German document.'

'Yes?' he said quickly. 'What of it?'

'Well, I thought . . . and I thought . . . and I thought. And the more I thought, the less good it seemed to me would be done to anyone by this endless searching for motives that none of us can ever establish now. Michel . . . we have to learn to forget, whether we like it or not. I've had my share of remembering. That's all right. That was human enough, I suppose. But now I want to be grown up . . . and I think, as I told Anne Greer this afternoon, that that's principally a matter of forgetting. So . . . I didn't want them to go on, ferreting out this scrap of information and that; building up a picture out of the wrong bits of jig-saw—making them fit together to form the picture they've already decided to expect. You never know: the pilot may have had an accident. I don't suppose he'd have bothered to report dropping those bombs if there hadn't been something wrong with the mechanism. Who was going to challenge him, anyway? And he may still be alive.'

'It's old history now . . . I'd rather it were all forgotten.'

He nodded. He seemed very pensive as he said:
'Forgotten. . . yes. Though I do not think you should regret the impulse which made you begin this affair.'

'No . . . neither do I.' She did not press him to explain further. She, too, could see the advantages: perhaps more advantages than were apparent to him. 'At least, it got poor old Philip what he'd have always loved.'

He opened his cigarette-case, and offered it to her. She took a cigarette, and he offered her the lighter, whose instant flame had impressed her with a sense of his orderliness of mind and habit. He said, 'Would you be happy, now, that the . . . the pilot did not drop those bombs on purpose?'

Phyllida looked straight into the eyes of the man who loved her.

She said, 'I shall have to assume that he didn't mean to.'

'But suppose you had proof, Phyllida?'

Go on, the inward voice ordered. Go on!

'I told you, Michel: today puts an end to everything. I don't want anything more raked up. Let the past look after itself. . . '

'Very well,' he nodded. 'But if you wanted proof . . . '

Her heart was beating wildly now. She said:

'If I *did* . . . could you supply it, Michel?'

He looked down at his glass. He said:

'It depends what you would call proof. . . '

Phyllida said:

'Proof is what the heart accepts without question. There is no other proof. Michel: look at me!'

He raised his head, and when she had seen what was in his eyes she put out a hand, and held his hand so tightly that he was astonished at her strength. She said:

'Michel: you are not to worry. You are not to fear. There's nothing now you could tell me which could make any difference.'

He sighed, and his eyes dropped.

'No: Michel. Look at me! That's better!' She smiled tenderly. 'You silly! You fool, Michel! Do you know, Michel, what I'll never regret in all this business? Do you?'

'No, my darling. What?'

'That I followed my heart, Michel. No matter what foolishness doing that can lead one into, no foolishness which comes of it is so great as the folly of not following one's heart. Sometimes it's the only way of proving to oneself one has a heart to follow.'

'Perhaps . . . ' he said, and there was the shine of tears in his eyes.

'And if your heart led you to espouse ~~a man~~ which . . . Well: Michel, I know now why you came to see me. I know. . . .

'You do.' There was a great fear in his eyes.

'No: Michel. Look . . . hold my hand, dearest! (Never mind the waiter. . . .) There! Better?'

'I feel sick . . . ' he said.

'You needn't. And since there aren't going to be any secrets between us any more let me say I don't need the proof you were talking about.'

'No?'

'No. Michel: you haven't told me this yet.' She held his eyes: forcing him to set beyond the petty and immediate, to something which, if yet instant, was great enough to be worth the striving. 'Michel: *what was your rank in the Air Force?*'

He held his head up. His eyes did not flinch.

'*Fliegerkapitän*, Phyllida. . . .'

She could hear the bombs falling. . . . She could hear the crash of falling masonry. . . . The thin shrieks blotted out by the whispering thunder of dust. . . . The Air Ministry regrets to inform you . . . Gusher . . . The kindly, hesitant voice of the King . . . 'I wish, Mrs. Hammond, that your husband could have been here to . . .'

And then: other images. *Bale out!* The man nursing the battered 'plane. . . . The level landscape of Northsexshire. . . . The sudden, unexpected upward bound of the 'plane as the bombs released themselves. . . . The sea. . . . The sea. . . . And far ahead, the low-lying coast of Holland.

Phyllida did not hear the explanations:

' . . . they promised us we should fight only on the Russian front. . . . It gave me a chance. . . . After all, it was for my country I was fighting. . . .'

She put out a hand which groped blindly for his.

'Michel: pay the bill . . . and let's get out. I want to talk to you. Oh, I do so want to talk to you . . . my dearest. Alone.'